



# The Toilet Paper Fairy has left the building...

...or, the work of the PEPartnership in meeting the need  
for personal and household hygiene products

A presentation for  
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Madison Nonprofit Day  
August 5, 2010 ♦ Goodman Community Center

We've been using the image of the Toilet Paper Fairy for about a year – because the common (though unconscious) assumption seems to be that there *is* such a creature, a fairy who flits about the house unseen, refilling toilet paper spindles and putting out new toothpaste. Unfortunately, contrary to this popular belief, the Toilet Paper Fairy has left the building – and that leaves a whole lot of people in poverty with a whole lot of problems.

## My day... and welcome to it!

There's a whole lot that most of us take for granted – those of us who aren't constrained by the rules and regulations involved in getting help to deal with our poverty. In fact, we tend to take things so much for granted that we sometimes don't even notice what we've got. Let's begin our discussion by taking a look at the beginning of the day – but a day *without* some of what we take so much for granted.

First things first... stumble into the bathroom, and take care of that pressing urge. Except that – oh, gosh – there's no toilet paper left. That's going to be decidedly awkward....

We won't dwell overlong on what I ended up doing; we'll just assume I found some reasonably non-disgusting way of coping, and move on to the next task of the day....



Maybe the shower will relax me... or maybe not. Looks like I'm out of soap and shampoo.

Well, they say water's the universal solvent. Better hope that's true.



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Well, at least I can get dressed. Hmmm. I seem to be out of deodorant, *and* everything I've got in the way of office wear needs to be washed.

Pity I don't have any laundry soap to wash 'em in.

Okay, let's grab whatever smells least and feel smoothest.

Yuck.

I guess I better not get too close to anybody today....



Maybe I'll just have some breakfast.

Oh, that's right. No dish soap, either. Hmmm. Well, I can always munch the cereal straight out of the box....

Okay, let's finish up – get rid of the morning breath, and brush the teeth.

Oops – looks like the toothbrush has finally disintegrated, and the toothpaste has finally disappeared. Well, there's always the old “finger and baking soda” routine, I guess. Hate the taste, but needs must....

So I'm a whoppin' 30 minutes into my day, and it's already shot.

I'd go back to bed, if I thought it'd help.



For most of us, a day like this might occur occasionally – most of us have had the unfortunate experience of discovering, too late, that we've forgotten to refill the toilet paper spindle, or didn't realize that we were out of shampoo, or that the toothbrush has given its last.

But for too many in our community, this frustration is the norm, not the exception.

## **Food stamps, not grocery stamps**

It comes as a surprise to a lot of us “regular” folks, but food stamps don't in fact work to buy anything but food. We may think of them as the equivalent of “grocery stamps,” since they're so often spent at the grocery store – but while most of us can fill up on the products we need to keep ourselves and our homes clean and spiffy during our regular grocery shopping trips, folks who use food stamps can *only* use them to buy food (and not all foods, at that; but that's another story for another day).

And those non-food essentials add up pretty quickly. According to the 2008 Consumer Expenditure Survey, the median family in the United States spent about almost one-quarter as much on personal and household hygiene supplies as they did on food. That's getting to be a pretty major category of expenditure. In my household – which is only two people, with no children – that comes to about \$25 a week, or \$100 a month.

And it's not just that these products are overlooked in one category of assistance: they're pretty much ignored across the board.

Right now, pretty much every definition of "poverty" works from a definition developed in the late 1960s by Mollie Orshansky. It was a pretty good definition at the time: Ms. Orshansky's research had shown that, pretty much across the board, regardless of household wealth, most families spent a third of their income on food.

So, she reasoned, if a family's income was such that one-third of it couldn't buy enough food to provide adequate nutrition, that family was in trouble.

To take a very simplified example, if the minimum amount of food necessary to adequately feed a family cost \$100 a month, then that family would need at least \$300 per month in order to have "enough."

Today, though, food represents a much smaller percentage of the average family's expenses; in the median income bracket, food represents only about ten percent of the spending. But since we're still assuming that food represents a third of necessary expenses, we're multiplying the amount needed for food by three and assuming that the result is adequate for *all* expenses:

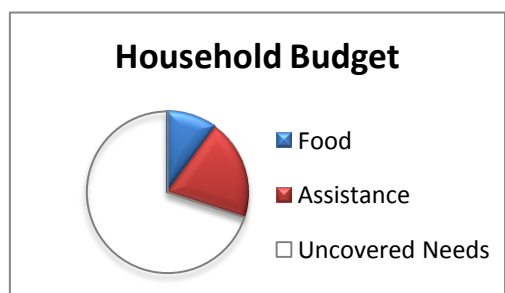
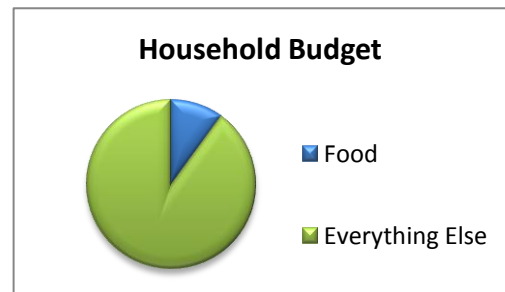
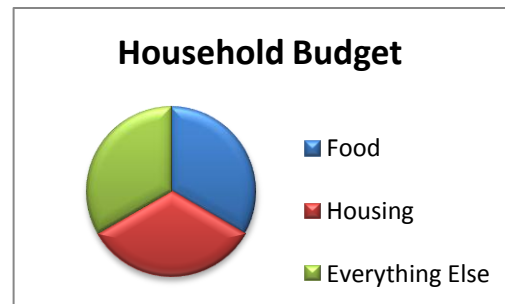
If we stay with our hypothetical family and assume that they still to spend \$100 on food for adequate nutrition, that means that we're only willing to help them out with another \$200 to get to the \$300 we think they need – but that \$100 for food is actually just *one-tenth* of what they need. The assistance we're providing to get them to "having enough" – \$300 per month – actually falls short by about \$700 dollars.

In fact, nobody's quite sure *what* the proper multiplier should be to get from food costs to "enough" – but everybody *is* sure that our current multiplier is way, way, way too low.

And so, people in poverty are left trying to fill the gap. And that means making choices. Unfortunately, it's not simply a case of recommending that people in poverty learn to better prioritize, to recognize what are "luxuries" and focus on the necessities.

Most of the time, people in poverty are having to make choices between *this* necessity and *that* necessity: Feed the kids? or pay the utility bills? Fill up the car so they can get to work? or buy laundry soap? Get that aching tooth taken care of? or pay the rent?

And the area that we deal with – personal and household hygiene – is in fact one of those necessities. Unfortunately, most of the time everybody figures that somebody else



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is dealing with that need; and the problem with assuming that *somebody's* dealing with an issue usually means that *nobody* is.

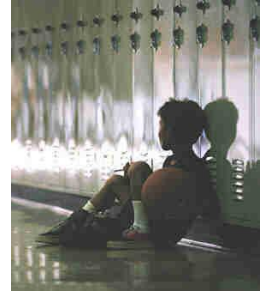


What we do isn't hunger...

...but folks will eat a lot safer if they can wash the pots and pans they cook the food in.

What we do isn't education...

...but both kids and adults learn a lot better if they aren't worried about classmates teasing them about their clothes, their odor, their appearance.



What we do isn't employment...

...but it's a lot easier for folks to get and keep a job when they're able to shower, shampoo, shave, wash their clothes, use deodorant....

What we do isn't housing...

...but the landlord will probably be a lot happier if the floors and windows and toilet are cleaned occasionally; and getting the security deposit back will almost certainly not happen without that.



What we do isn't health...

...but folks are much less prone to a whole host of health problems if they can brush their teeth on a regular basis, and simple scratches are a lot less likely to turn infected if soap and band-aids are available.

Basically, the essentials of personal and household hygiene:

- are not taken care of by some “toilet paper fairy” who stops by in the night to replenish the supply and restock the shelves in the bathroom...
- nor are they luxuries that can be left off to one side until all the other needs are met.

They are real needs, that have been overlooked by our social and welfare policies for far too long. They are real needs, that affect all of the areas of life, from hunger abatement to housing availability to health care to employment to education to community involvement.

## **A brief look at the history and mission of the Personal Essentials Pantry and the PEPartnership**

The actual seed of the Pantry was planted on May 11, 2006, at an adult ed discussion group. It was one of those lazy, getting-to-the-end-of-the year sessions, when someone asked, “What more can we be doing for our neighborhood?”

And the answer came back immediately, as James said, “You know, food pantries are always being asked for personal hygiene stuff; and the pantries never have it. We should do that.”

### **Personal Essentials Pantry Mission Statement**

We have been blessed by God with an abundance of gifts.  
In response, we share God’s love and God’s kingdom.

We are:

Helping with the essentials  
of personal and household hygiene,  
showing God’s grace and love  
through these tangible gifts.

The goal of the congregation as it began the Pantry was to reach 50 households within the first twelve months.

At the end of thirteen months, when we actually sat down and counted, we discovered that we had registered a total of 338 households; and as of June 2010, we stood at a total of 3,460 registered households. Even if we only consider “active” households who have visited within the last 18 months, that still leaves us with about 2,200 households – and with our current average of 3.15 people per household, that’s some 6,900 individuals. Given the average demographic breakdown by age, half of those, or about 3,450, will be children, and of those some 1,725 will be children 3 years or younger.

That’s a lot of people. And considering that we’re still seeing anywhere between 3 and 20 new households every time we’re open, we don’t think we can claim to have reached capacity.

Starting this year, late summer of 2010, we’ve begun a new initiative, working with some other pantries in the Madison area to coordinate distribution of personal/household hygiene products. Our hope is that by working together, sharing information

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and using the same definitions for product distribution, we can reach more people without risk of duplicating services. As of September, there are two agencies up and running as part of the PEPartnership; by next summer, we anticipate that there will be at least four.

## **Control: ugly but necessary**

Nobody really likes to think about it, but control is a necessary part of any ministry. Food pantries have been in existence now for a lot of years, so there's a lot of information, and a lot of good resources, on how to set them up, how to run them. Allow free choice between food stuffs, allow "at will shopping," and provide a broad range of the components of the food pyramid, and you're in pretty good shape. And we've got pretty good information on how much food a given family needs for a given period of time: 23 pounds of food, if it's a good assortment, should feed a family of 3 for 3-5 days.

But personal and household hygiene products are another kettle of fish – so to speak. While it's true that we don't have to worry nearly so much about product expiration dates – it takes a *loooooong* time for a bottle of shampoo to go bad – the products we deal with have much more variety in terms of function, use, and lifespan.

Families with no infants or toddlers, for instance, probably don't need diapers; families with no teenage or adult women probably don't need tampons; and families with no teenage or adult men probably don't need men's deodorant.

On the other hand, there are families with special needs. Some individuals have medical conditions that cause incontinence, so that they continue to need diapers well after the "normal" age for potty training – even into adolescence or adulthood. Some families have members with allergies, and need fragrance-free or hypoallergenic products. Some children reach puberty far earlier than "normal," and need deodorant, razors, menstrual products.

And unlike food pantries, where tuna, hamburger, and chicken are pretty interchangeable, few of our products can be swapped. Shampoo and deodorant, laundry soap and toothpaste, combs and toothbrushes are all pretty much single-purpose. Using a toothbrush to comb your hair is pretty futile; and so is trying to brush your teeth with your pocket comb.

To add to the problem, different products have different life-spans, especially as family size increases.

Which means that we have to look at how best to control distribution. Contrary to popular belief, we don't have a magic wand that lets us create products with a point and swish, a *lá Harry Potter*. There's no magic in the incantation "But I really need it!" – much as we might like there to be. And our resources, like everybody's resources, are limited.

One method of handling this issue, of course, is to control distribution by controlling and regulating our guests. That's the route that a lot of pantries and agencies have taken – and in some circumstances, that can make a lot of sense. But we thought it might be worth giving it a shot by controlling the products on the basis of their function and use.



The most fundamental reason for our deciding to control distribution on the basis of product function and utility is that the usual rule of “once per month” for allowed guest visits just plain doesn’t work for this area.

In the chart below, we’ve selected seven of the four dozen or so products we try to keep in stock, and shown the expectable duration for each product – that’s the black stars at the bottom of each row – versus what would be given out if we followed the common “once per month” rule for guest visits – the gray stars at the top of each row. As you can see, there’s only one product out of the seven – laundry soap –where the expectable product duration actually matches that “once per month” rule – and that’s only true if the household has just one or two members. If we were to follow the “once per month” rule, we would be giving out toothbrushes about four times more than necessary; dental floss about six times more than necessary; sanitary pads or tampons about two-third *less* often than necessary; glass cleaner about three times more than necessary; combs and brushes about twelve times more than necessary; and diapers about one-fourth as often as necessary. That’s just plain not a good fit.

Laundry Soap	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Toothbrush	★											
Dental Floss	★											
Pads/Tampons	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Glass Cleaner	★											
Comb/Brush	★											
Diapers	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

It’s true that we could repackage things to make them fit the once-a-month scenario. It means a lot of repackaging – glass cleaner, for example, would have to be divvied up – or buying things in smaller quantities, which means a lot more wasted packaging per useful product. And unfortunately, we haven’t really figured out how to hand out a quarter of a toothbrush or a twelfth of a comb.

Instead, we developed a software package – PEPbase – on the assumption that what we need to control is the *product*, not the *guest*.

## PEPbase: A quick overview

PEPbase consists of three databases, along with the user input and error-checking and control routines to let them communicate.

The Household database (shown in the screen shot below) gives us the information about household composition and demographics. We know who’s associated with what household; we know how many people are in it, how old they are, and what gender they are; we know if they have special needs; we know whether there are language or reading difficulties; we know where they live. No matter who comes in to do the shopping, we can find their household; no matter how long it’s been since they last visited, we know how old everybody is; and nobody has to continually explain allergies or incontinence or overly precocious 10-year-olds who need deodorant.

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-- Update information for an existing household record --																																																								
Make any changes, corrections, or additions to the household record.																																																								
MAIN INFO	Name		First: Alex		Last: Ohara		Pantry-ID#: 34																																																	
	Address		Num: 1414		Street: Telsa Terrace		Apt#:																																																	
	City: Minneapolis		County: Hennepin		ST: MN		Zip: 55410																																																	
	ContactInfo		Phone1: 612-555-4321		Phone2:		Email:																																																	
HOUSEHOLD MEMBER INFO	ID	First Name	Last Name		Active?	Birth Date	Gender	Allergies?	Incont?																																															
	66	Alex	Ohara		Yes	1972-03-14	Male	No	No																																															
<a href="#">Add Members</a>																																																								
ADDL INFO	Reg Date: 2009-03-18				Mr. O'Hara has extremely low vision; please have a staff member help him with the shopping list. (3/19/09, cjt)																																																			
	ID Verified? Yes		Diffic Reading? Yes		Language? English																																																			
SHOPPING INFO	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Use Household Values <input type="radio"/> Set Manual Override Values																																																							
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">...Males...</th> <th colspan="2">...Females...</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Total</th> <th>Incont</th> <th>Total</th> <th>Incont</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				...Males...		...Females...		Total	Incont	Total	Incont	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">...Males...</th> <th colspan="2">...Females...</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Total</th> <th>Incont</th> <th>Total</th> <th>Incont</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					...Males...		...Females...		Total	Incont	Total	Incont	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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Last Visit: 2009-06-01 Allergies In Household: No				Adults (18+) Teens (12-17) Youth (4-11) Infants (0-3) Allergies In Household? Yes																																																				

The Product database records the information for each product, essentially defining it. Is it for personal use only, or can it be shared by the entire household? Who would or would not be expected to use it? Is there anybody who absolutely *shouldn't* use it? How long should it last for this family? What's its name in Spanish? in French? in Hmong? Do we currently have it on our shelves, or is it out of stock?

### Pantry Product Definition / Editing

You are currently editing a product record. You need to <a href="#">save</a> or <a href="#">abandon</a> it before you can select a different record to work on.				shampoo			
<a href="#">Print All Products</a>				<a href="#">Use Selected</a>			
Product ProdID: 43 Active: Yes	Location 16 Shelf 1 Bin	Name(s)		Properties		Duration/Frequency	
		English shampoo		Personal: No		#Days For A Household Size Of...	
		Spanish champÃe		For Gender: Both		1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9-10 11-12 13+	
		Hmong suj nupm		For Age: 4_plus		60 52 44 36 28 20 12	
French shampoo		Hypo-allergenic? No		For Incontinence? No		Category Name / Prod-Mult (if applicable)	
						Name X 1	
Enter (all languages) when applicable		Size/Type 1		Size/Type 2		Size/Type 3	
		Size/Type 4		Size/Type 5		Size/Type 6	
		Size/Type 7		Size/Type 8		Size/Type 9	
Notes:							

The Shopping History database is very simple: it tells us who got what, and when they got it, and how many of *it* they got.

Enter the pantryID and shopping date from the completed, fulfilled shopping list. Then, click on the 'Fetch Shopping Records' button to locate, display, and update the shopping data for that household and shopping date.			
PantryID: 4	Ramona Dumas		
Shop Date: 2009-05-07			
<a href="#">Fetch Shopping Records</a> <a href="#">Exit</a>			
Fill in the quantity-requested and quantity-received values for each of the products. If most (or all) of the approved product amounts were requested by the guest, you can click on the 'Copy-Approved' button at the top, and copy all the approved quantities into the quantity-requested column. Similarly, you can click on the 'Copy-Requested' button to transfer the requested amounts over to the quantity-received column. In either case, you can still modify these values (useful, if just one or two are different) before saving the information. It generally should <i>not</i> be needed, but if the shopping list indicates a product was manually approved, you can choose a new product to add to the list, and fill in the values. Important: You <i>must</i> click on the 'Save Shopping Data' button at the bottom of the page to save the updated shopping data. If you simply choose a new pantry-ID or shopping date, all your updates will be lost.			
<a href="#">*Add All Products</a> <a href="#">Add Product</a> <a href="#">Copy Approved</a> <a href="#">Copy Requested</a>			
Product Name	Qty-Approved	Qty-Requested	Qty-Received
glass cleaner	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
garbage bags	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
nail clipper	3	2	2
razor (woman's)	2	1	1
band-aids	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
soap	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
skin lotion	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
tampons	2	2	2
shampoo	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes
conditioner	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes
<a href="#">Save Shopping Data</a> <a href="#">Abandon Shopping Updates</a>			

With the information from these three databases, the software has the information it needs to generate a customized shopping list for *this* guest at *today's* visit.



Is this household eligible for all of the Pantry's products? Or do we knock off women's deodorant and menstrual products because the only female in the household is still only 6 years old?...

Are there any products that this household has received within their lifespan? Ah – they got laundry soap when they were here last week; they shouldn't need that this week. And they got toothbrushes last week, too; they shouldn't need those for another six months.

As a result, we won't be handing out products that shouldn't be needed, but there's no arbitrary constraint on what's available to the guest. They aren't done out of a product because they didn't request it in January and it's not on the February shopping list; but neither can they request a product every week that should last them months.

We have the control we needed, but we've done it in terms of controlling the *product*, *not* restricting our guests. We've done it, essentially, by analyzing the need first, and then trying to match the control to the need, rather than matching the need to the control.

## **The impact of appropriate control**

We discovered just how important this control was when we compared guest orders *before* we had the shopping history component in place, and *after* it was added. The household section of the PEPbase software came on-line in April of 2008, and that already gave us much increased information about who was in what household. It also told us when they had last visited – but it told us nothing about what they'd gotten on their last visit.

In preparation for a conference last winter, however, we looked at five households who had each made 20 visits to the Pantry between April of 2008 and October 2009. What we found surprised even us. We had spent the latter half of 2008 asking our guests to be on the honor system – that is, to not request product that they still had at home.

All of us would have described the household whose data is shown in the spreadsheet below as one of our more understanding, compliant households; always courteous, always cooperative, always understanding of our requests. However, when we looked at the actual data, we found a very different picture.

All of the orange-highlighted cells indicate product that should *not* have been available to the household. While few of the noncompliant requests are truly egregious, there are three visits between October 2 and October 16 – a period of only two weeks – where this household requested and was given multiple tubes of toothpaste, of shaving cream, of conditioner, and various baby products. In addition, there is one instance where the household requested and received three packs of diapers – with only one infant in the household.

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2008: Free visits allowed, but no control from shopping history. "Auth" status post-dated.																					
Date of Visit	4/3/2008		6/26/2008		7/17/2008		8/24/2008		8/28/2008		10/2/2008		10/9/2008		10/16/08		12/4/08		Ttl		
Product Name	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec	Req	Rec			
toilet paper	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1	1	1	6		
Kleenex	1	1	1	1							1	1	1	1	1	1			5		
laundry soap	1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			7		
dish soap	1	1									1	1							2		
all-purpose cleaner	1	1	1	1							1	1							3		
glass cleaner			1	1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11		
scouring cleanser											1	1							2		
paper towels			1	1							1	1							2		
garbage bags							1	1			1	1							2		
hair pick											1	1							2		
comb							2	2			1	1					2	2	5		
brush											1	1							2		
lip balm											1	1							2		
dental floss											1	1							2		
nail clipper											1	1							2		
emery board							1	1	4	4	1	1					5	5	11		
child's toothbrush							2	2			1	1	3	3					6		
adult toothbrush							2	2			1	1							3		
razor (woman's)											1	1					1	1	2		
deodorant (woman's)							1	1			1	1					1	1	3		
Q-tips			1	1							1	1							2		
razor (man's)	1	1															1	1	2		
deodorant (man's)	1	1					1	1			1	1					1	1	4		
band-aids	1	1	1	1	1	1					1	1							5		
soap	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16		
toothpaste	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16		
shaving cream	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16		
body powder (adult)											1	1							2		
skin lotion	1	1									1	1							2		
vaseline											1	1							2		
first aid ointment	1	1									1	1							2		
tampons	1	1					1	1			1	1							3		
sanitary pads	1	1									1	1			1	1	1	1	4		
panti-liners	1	1									1	1							2		
shampoo	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16		
conditioner	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16		
diaper rash ointment											1	1						1	2		
baby wipes						1	1				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5		
baby powder										1	1	1	1	1			1	1	4		
baby lotion										1	1	1	1	1			1	1	4		
baby shampoo										1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5		
diapers						1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6		
pull-ups																			0		
Totals	18	18	13	13	7	7	20	20	16	16	43	43	16	16	12	12	25	25	170		
Household consists of five individuals; 1 adult man, 1 adult woman, 2 female youth, and 1 female infant.																					

With the full implementation of PEPbase in 2009, the noncompliance essentially disappears, at least as far as the guest's actions. There are two instances where the guest received *both* diapers *and* pull-ups, but that is the result of Pantry staff not understanding or not enforcing the policy of either/or rather than both.

		2009: Free visits allowed; shopping lists generated with control from shopping history																												No out-of-stock																							
Date of Visit		4/3/2009						5/28/2009						6/7/2009						7/22/2009						7/12/2009						7/30/2009						8/6/2009						8/23/2009						9/6/2009			
Product Name		Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc	Asth	Req	Inc																
toilet paper		1	1	1	1	1	0				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
kleenex		1	1	0	1	1	1							1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
laundry soap		1	1	1	1	1	1				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
dish soap		1	1	1	1	1	1							1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
all-purpose cleaner		1	1	1	1	1	1							1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
glass cleaner		1	1	1	1	1	1							1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
scouring cleanser		1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1															
paper towels		1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																
garbage bags		1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																
hair pick		4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4															
comb		4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4															
brush		5	4	4	1	1	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4															
lip balm		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0																
dental floss		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0																
nail clipper		4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4															
emery board		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5																	
child's toothbrush		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3																	
adult toothbrush		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2																	
razor (woman's)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
deodorant (woman's)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
Q-tips		1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
razor (man's)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
deodorant (man's)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
band-aids		1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0																
soap		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
toothpaste		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
shaving cream		1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
body powder (adult)		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
skin lotion		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
vaseline		1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0																
first aid ointment		1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0																
tampons		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
sanitary pads		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
panti-lineers		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
shampoo		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
conditioner		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
diaper rash ointment		1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
baby wipes		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
baby powder		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
baby lotion		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
baby shampoo		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
diapers		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
pull-ups		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1																	
Totals		61	60	39	39	39	37	26	26	7	38	38	19	49	49	16	26	26	5	32	32	9	31	31	15	13	13																										

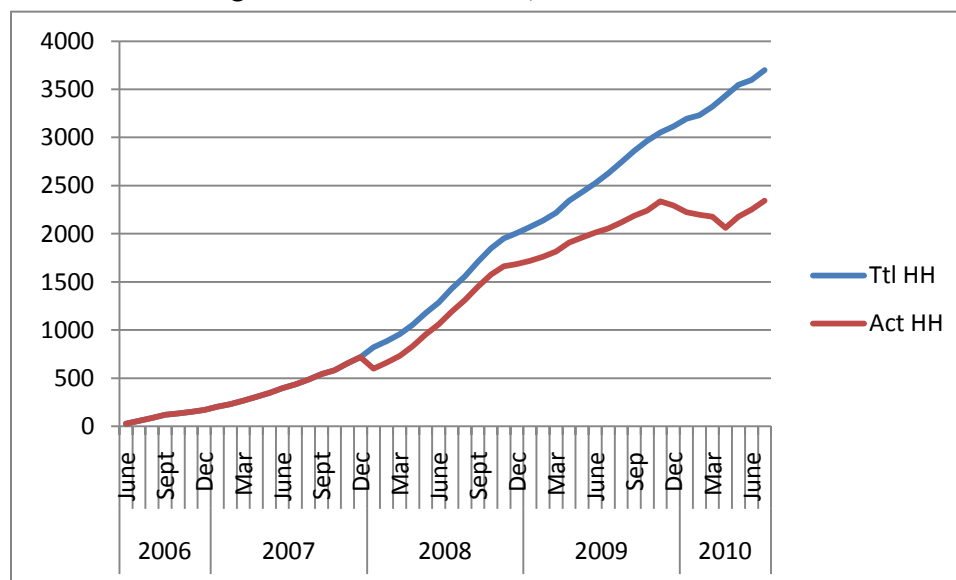
(The green shaded cells, by the way, are instances where the guest was not able to obtain products that she *was* entitled to, because we didn't have sufficient stock on hand to fulfill her order. That was another valuable piece of information that became available to us as a result of the PEPbase software.)

## What now know...

A major benefit that we hope to see as a result of the new PEPartnership is increased information about the scope of this need. As you can imagine, given how overlooked this need area is, there's much more we *don't* know than that we know.

We've already, over the past year or so, been gathering some data – one of the benefits of the PEPbase system is that it provides us with *lots* of data to analyze.

The beginning of what we know is how overwhelming – certainly to a single, small agency – the demand is. This chart shows the number of households registered with the Pantry (the top line), and the number of active households – that is, households who made at least one visit within 18 months of the each data point – since June of 2006, when we first opened our doors. The response to our service has been many, many orders of magnitude greater than we anticipated. It would seem that, indeed, people in poverty do want these products – do *need* these products. We continue to see anywhere from 10% to 40% new registrations each Pantry shift.

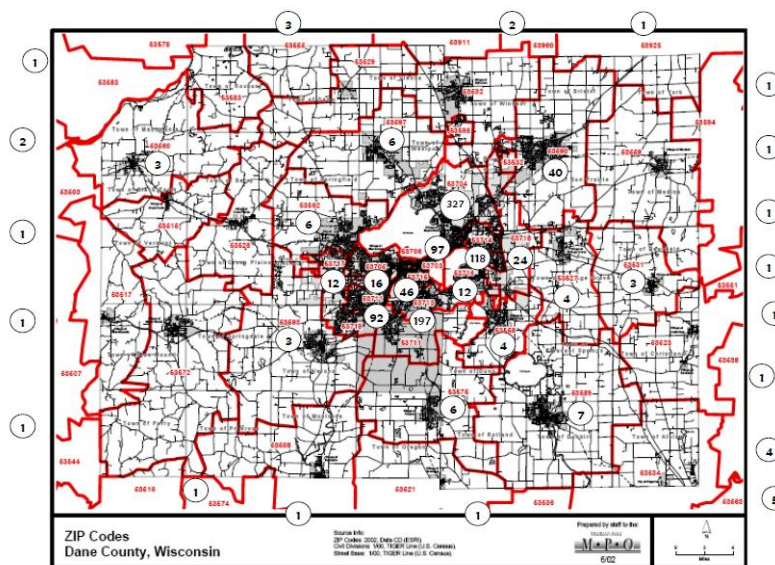


As the new PEPartnership starts up, we'll be looking at this data to see whether all of the agencies experience this type of growth.

We also know that we draw from a wide geographic area. The map below was prepared for our second anniversary, in June of 2008, so the numbers have gotten larger, but the general distribution is about the same. There are certainly areas of the county where our guests are more concentrated, but there's no area that's immune to people experiencing poverty.

Part of the reason for the greater concentration within the 53704 and 53714 ZIP codes is also Pantry's location – it's the yellow star just above and right of center, and it lies just about on the dividing line between the two ZIP code areas.

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### Personal Essentials Pantry Household Distribution as of June, 2008

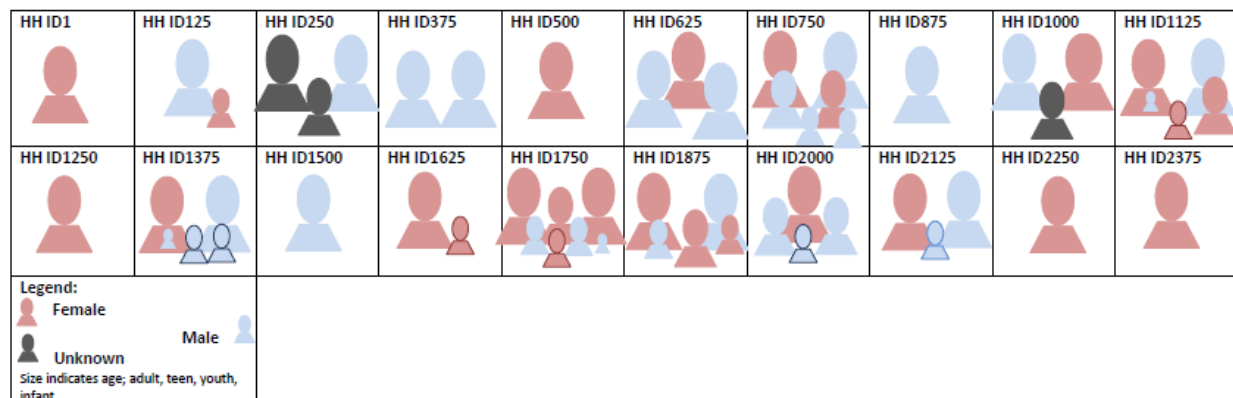
This breadth of geographic distribution was, of course, a major factor in the new PEPartnership – working to get better access to personal and household hygiene products in more areas across the city, so that families didn't need to be coming all the way across town. We're going to be looking at the data over the next year to see whether there is a shift in usage across the agencies involved in the PEPartnership – will we see people using only the agency nearest them? will we see people using multiple agencies, getting product that Agency A didn't have from Agency B?

One of the first questions we get asked is, “What does the ‘typical’ household look like?” The quick answer is: There is no typical household.

As of August 1 of this year we had 3,708 registered households with a total of 11,659 individuals. The average family size within the PEP guest population thus came out to 3.14, a little bit larger than in the general population, and a little bit larger than it was last year. This tells us that we've been reaching more families, not just individuals.

We know that we had 4,755 males and 6,145 females – that’s about 47% male, and 53% female, compared to Dane County’s average of about 50% each.

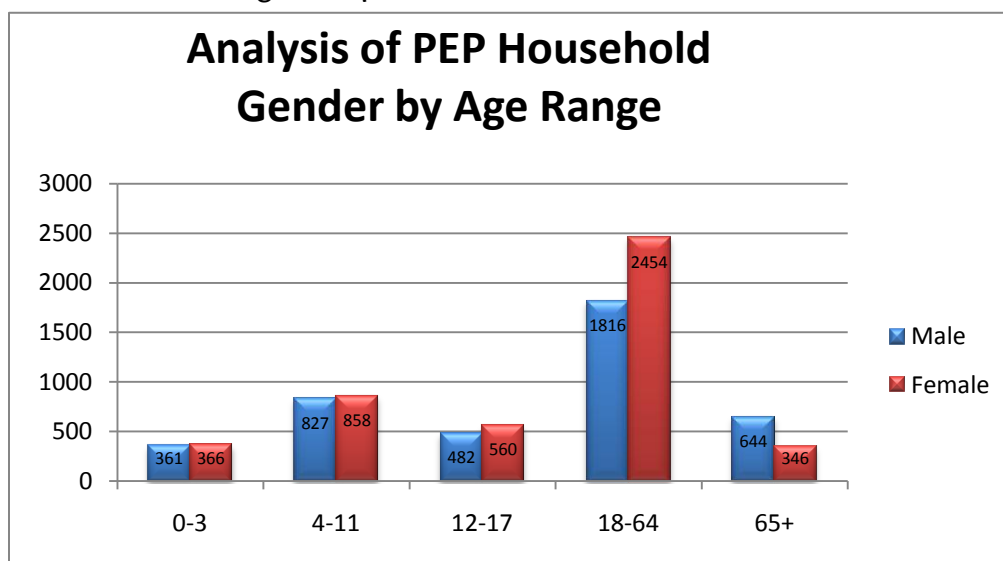
We also know that our youngest household member at just about any point in time is a newborn, and that our oldest member as of last fall was 95 years old. As you can see, however, we really don't have a "typical" household.



The figure above shows a semi-randomly selected 20 households – every 125<sup>th</sup> household, starting with Household #1. (This isn't truly random; we know that any household whose ID is below about 1225 was registered with us prior to April 1 of 2008, and that they're numbered in alphabetic order, not by registration date. For households with ID numbers greater than about 1225, we know that they're numbered by registration date. However, there was no cherry-picking of households to come up with any sort of quote "representative" un-quote sampling of size or composition.)

We took a look at our household from some other angles, too.

For instance, we took a closer look at the gender of the Pantry population, and discovered some interesting discrepancies.



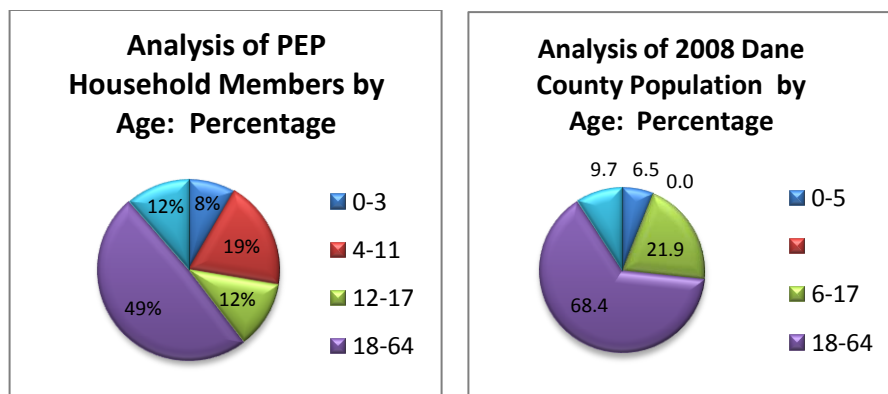
Notice that across dependent children, the ratio of male to female is what we'd expect given the distribution in the general population. However, for adults between 16 and 64 – the age range we would expect to see for head of household – we see a much stronger presence of females. Females make up 57.5% of the individuals in this age range, compared to 42.5% male. Not a surprise; it's been known for decades that poverty hits single-female-headed households disproportionately. If anything, it's a surprise that the discrepancy is this low.

Somewhat surprising to us was that males predominate in the 65+ category. Within the general population, females tend to be predominant in this range. Here, however, males outnumber females almost 2:1.

We'll be continuing to look at this data, to see what it might have to tell us about how to better support our guest population, and implications for poverty policies more generally.

And as is the case with so many measurements of poverty, children and the elderly are over-represented in the Pantry population compared to the general population. Infants, children and youth account for about half of our population, but only about a quarter of the general population. The discrepancy in the 65+ category is not nearly as striking; that represents about 12% of our population, as against about 10% of the general population.

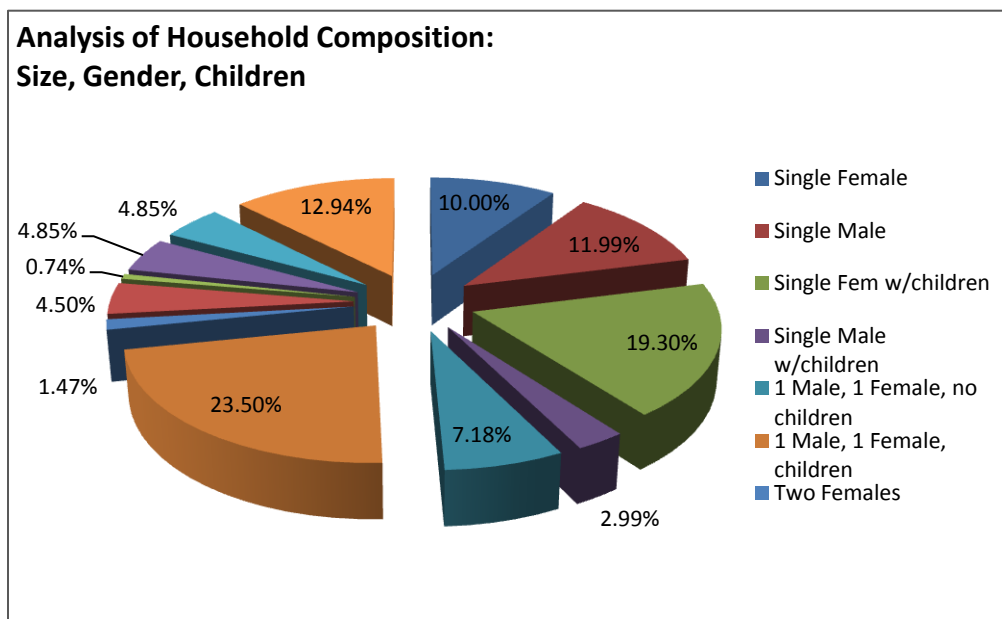
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Source for Dane County data:  
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/55/55025.html>

In addition to just looking at gender and age, we took a look at household composition.

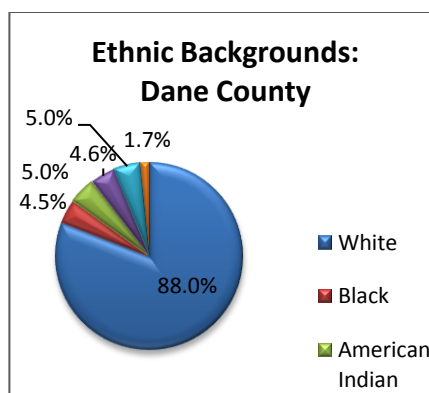
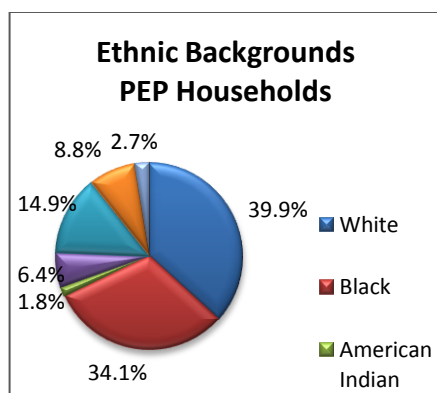
As we mentioned earlier, there is no “typical” household. There is, in fact, a great variety. Again, as with the study of gender by age, we don’t have parallel data for the general population to compare these data to. We know anecdotally that there are many households that are three (or more) generations, many that are partners plus adult relatives or adult friends. It would be interesting to be able to compare this to the general population.



One of the temptations, of course, is to label “atypical” households as abnormal and aberrant – that is, the fact that they are atypical is a direct cause for their being in poverty. We need to remind ourselves that it is frequently the reverse: that is, poverty causes households to adopt coping strategies that are “abnormal” as compared to the general population, but help achieve economic survival for households living in poverty.

We also looked at the ethnic background of our guests. We don’t collect data on ethnicity in our regular registration procedures; this data was gathered via questionnaire during October of 2009. Again, it’s not a scientifically random sampling, but it was not hand-picked or manipulated in any way.





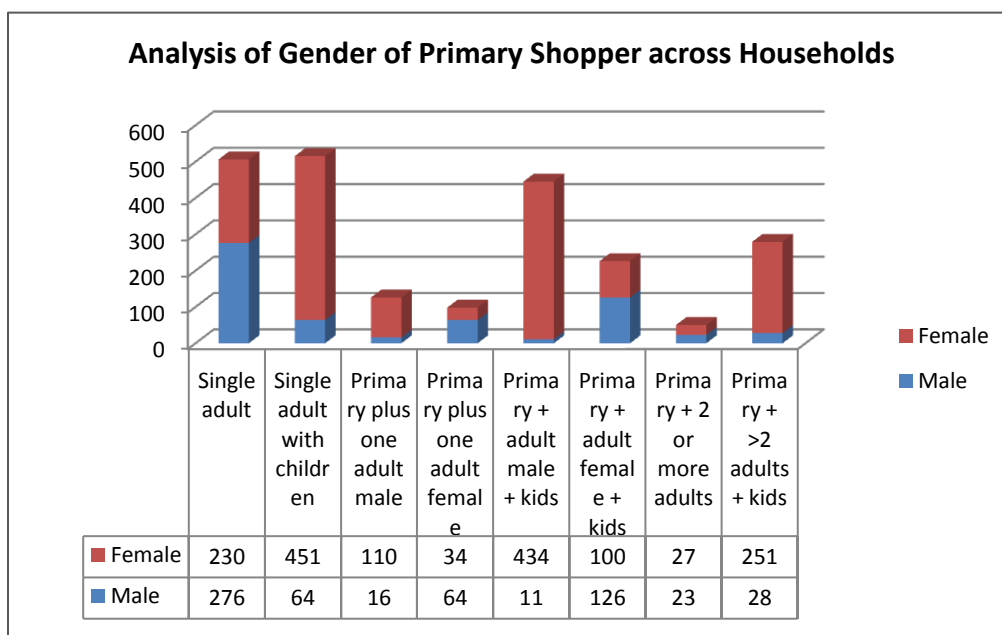
Source for Dane County data:  
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/55/55025.html>

It is absolutely *not* surprising that people of color are much more prevalent within our guest population than within the general population of Dane County. In fact, people of color comprise more than half of our population, while they represent less than one-quarter of the general population. The largest percentage increases come in the African-American and Latino populations, which are about nine and three times greater, respectively, than in the general population.

What is distressingly surprising is that many of the folks who are around our building during the week assumed that people of color made up much *more* of our service population than is the fact; they were assuming that our guest population was more like 90%+ African-American.

(We also show a higher percentage of households labeled as multi-cultural, but that is probably an artifact of the different sampling methods.)

Another aspect to examine is that, considering that this area is considered to be “women’s work,” there is a fairly high percentage of men who are the main Pantry contacts within these households.



Mostly it’s women who are the shoppers, but not always. For households with only one member, for example, we have a little more than 10% more men than women. And

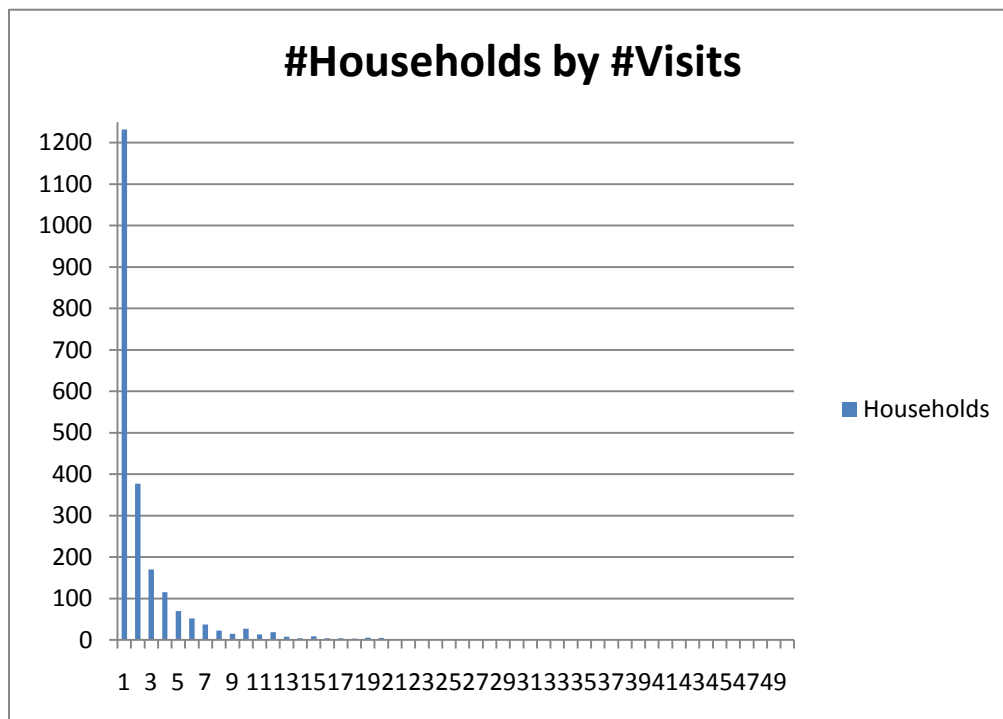
The Toilet Paper Fairy has left the building...

where there is one adult (only) in the households, it's almost as likely to be a male-headed household as it is a female-headed household – we have 96 male-headed households, and 126 female-headed households.

Where there are two adults (only) in the household, it's almost evenly split between the genders as to who registers and therefore does (at least the first) shopping.

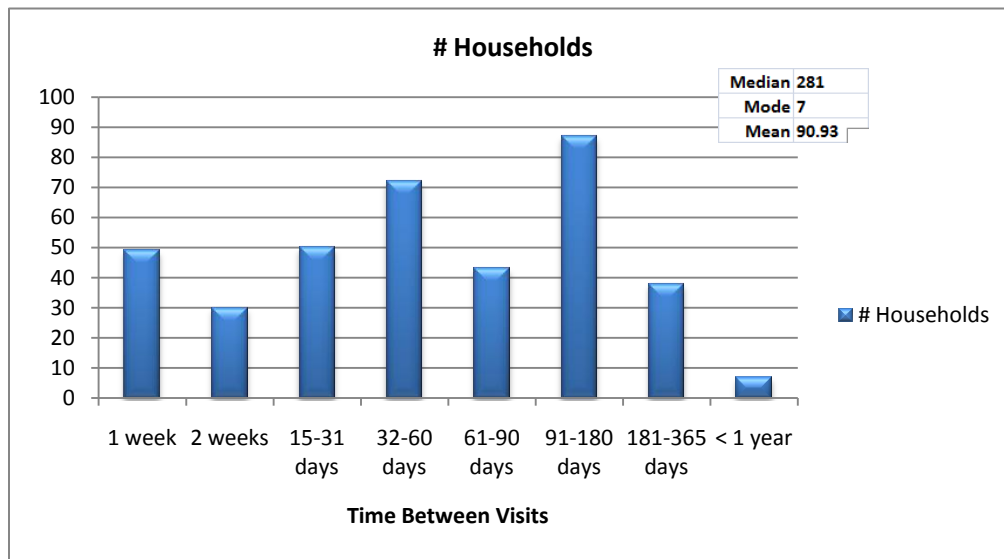
Where we have adults and children, it goes as we'd expect from the normal population; there are 434 households where the adult female registered for herself, her male partner, and children, and only 100 households where the adult male registered for himself, his partner, and children; and we similarly see that households with three (or more) adults and children are primarily registered by a female. (We do have a few households where the two adults are both male or both female, with no children.)

Another measure of household activity, of course, is how many visits are “typical” of household use. Here, too, we don't have definitive numbers yet, mostly because our tenure as a pantry is too short, and we don't know what constitutes a “typical” tenure for a household. It is, though, a question that we often get – considering that we allow “as often as you need to, as many times as you need to,” aren't we getting inundated by families? Don't people abuse the privilege?



In fact, the answer is that the vast, vast majority of our guests have made only one visit to us. We don't yet know the *why* of this. This is data, again, from Fall 2009, but the situation hasn't really changed that much as we continue to track this. And as we'll see in a minute, this huge number – some 1,232 – can't be accounted for as all having registered within the last couple of months before our analysis. Are they households who were experiencing a sudden but very short-term crisis? were they so frustrated by what they didn't get or we didn't do that they never came back? have they moved away? We don't know the answer; but we definitely want to find out.

The next most frequent number of visits per household – and the median number of visits overall – is 2. The data again is from last fall, when we had 377 households that had made two visits, and two visits only. According to our data, they are all households who have registered since January 1, 2008 and before September 30, 2009. We really can't say much more about that at this point in our analyses; but it is worth noting that there are 11 households where more than a year elapsed between the first and second visit. Indeed, there are two households who have 560 days between their two visits – almost two weeks more than the 18 months we have been using as a rough guide to judging a household as inactive.

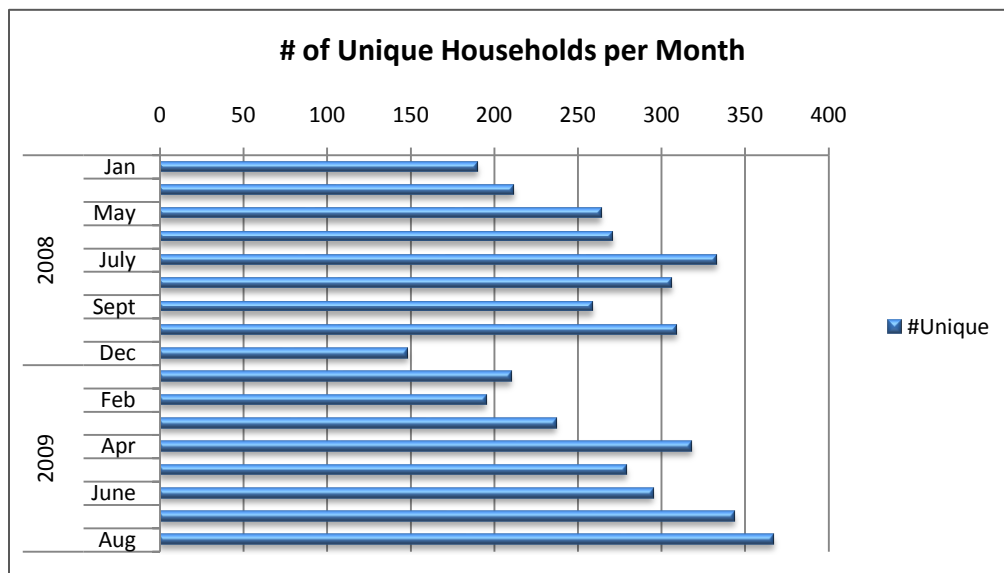


The average or mean gap between first and second visits is about 91 days, but the variance in lapsed time is significant, as you can gather by the statistical calculations of mode and median. The median value – the halfway point between most frequent and most seldom visits – is 281. One week between visits is the most common value; of these 49 households, more than two thirds visited only in 2008. Again, these households may have made only two visits because they got frustrated with our procedures or with what we weren't able to provide them; or it may be that they were in a crisis situation, came to us for help for a week or so, and then didn't need us again. It does suggest, however, that the vast majority of families are truly using our service for crisis relief rather than ongoing "normal" support.

On the other hand, our Pantry policies, which allow visits on an as-needed basis, means that some households come back repeatedly to ask for the products that we were out of on their first, second, third, fifteenth, sixteenth... visits. Our most frequent guests may visit us seven times out of nine sequential service shifts in a given month – in the hopes that, eventually, they'll be able to get all of the products that their households is eligible for on the basis of household composition. This isn't always a very helpful strategy – the family may spend much more in time and transportation costs than they receive from us – but it's a strategy that a number of families use. And, until we get the funding to stock *all* of the products in *close to* the quantity needed, it's a strategy that we'll almost certainly continue to see.

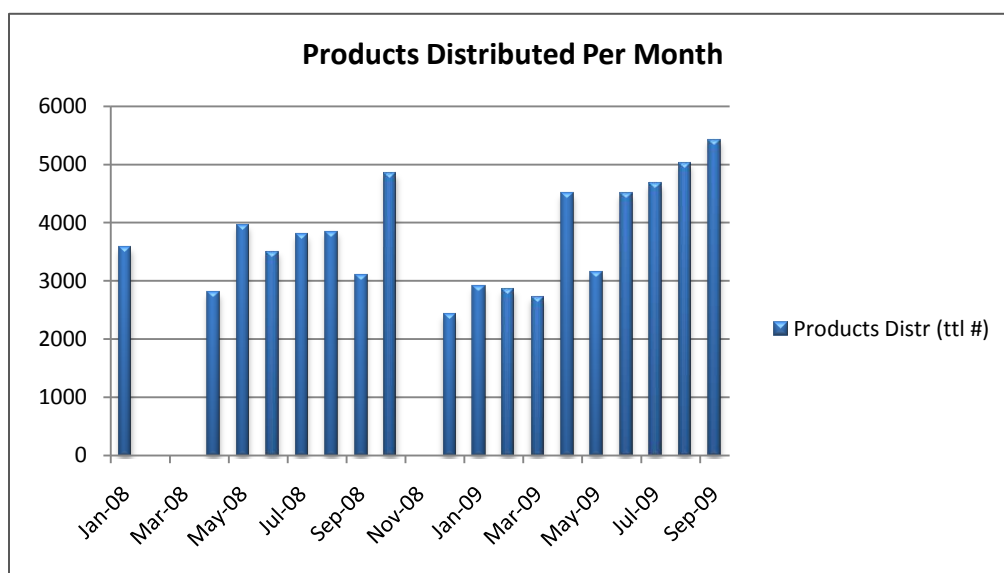
The Toilet Paper Fairy has left the building...

We also looked at the number of unique households visiting us each month. How many distinct households do we actually see each month? And what's the average number of visits each household makes?



Again, we don't have sufficient longitudinal data to explain the peaks and valleys here. We do know that the average number of visits per household per month has stayed roughly the same, at about 1.2 visits per household per month, within our data. Is this because our households are accustomed to the typical limits they face with other direct service agencies, of one visit per month? Are they consciously timing their visits to coincide with the defined lifespan and therefore availability of products under our software system? Again, we simply don't know as yet.

If the number of total visits we handle each month seems large, the number of products distributed per month is dauntingly large. This graph may be the same physical height as the last one, but the scale is vastly increased – more than ten times larger, in fact.

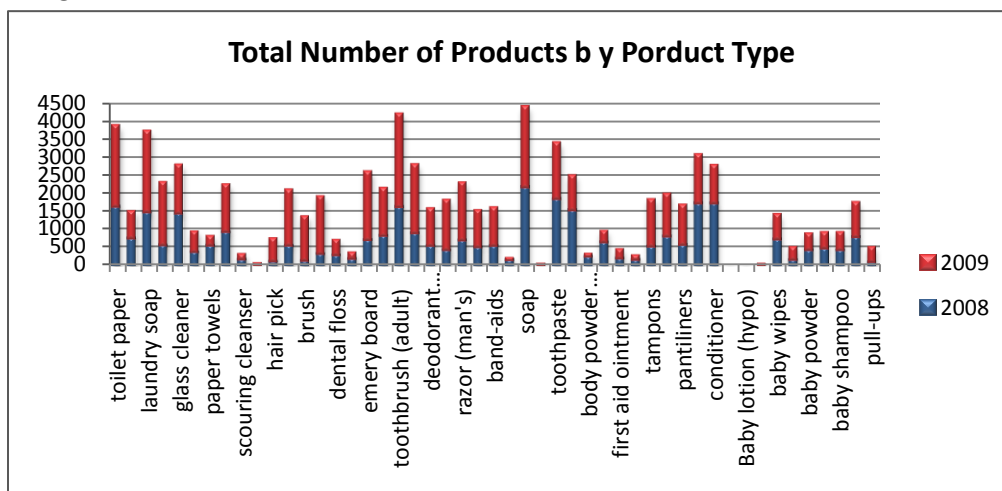


In the chart above, we have data starting with January of 2008 – although the quality of data changes greatly between 2008 and 2009. (You’ll notice, also, that we have no data for February, March, or November of 2008; those spreadsheets apparently never got translated and read into the PEPbase data.)

The overall average number of products provided per visit has been staying between 13 and 16 throughout this time, and has been pretty consistent at about 14 for all of 2009.

Unfortunately, that average is more a reflection of our limitation on funds than it is of our ability to meet the need. When we analyzed our ability to fill the requests from our guests, we were only reaching about 50% fulfillment. While this datum is somewhat skewed because of the guests’ ability to make multiple sequential requests for products they haven’t received, we still should probably have distributed 50% more products than we show here.

This chart shows the total number of each product we distributed, from January 1, 2008, through October 31, 2009. (Data for 2006 and 2007 just plain isn’t available.)



The legend doesn’t show all of the products – there isn’t enough space. And not all of the products have been given out in sufficient quantity to show up on this chart. As you can see, there’s a huge variation in quantity across product, which is, unfortunately, not so much a reflection of the actual need as it is our ability to meet the need. We have, however, tried to give funding priority to the products most frequently requested, so there is at least some correlation between the quantity we’ve distributed and the relative demand for that product.

### ...And what we still don’t know

However, there’s still a *lot* we need to explore in this area.

We really don’t have a good handle on what constitutes “enough” for housework – which is probably one of the reasons that this area doesn’t get included in financial or labor calculations. We can all point to cases that we know are insufficient, but there’s no ceiling on what’s “enough.” If we can figure out maintenance costs for cars, though, shouldn’t we be able to figure out what’s needed for this maintaining home and self?



The Toilet Paper Fairy has left the building...

We also need to explore possible product pipelines. Gleaning, or recovering usable products that would otherwise have been thrown out, is now a pretty solid tradition in food pantries. It not only makes food available more cheaply, but it saves us as society generally a pretty penny in what we don't have to put into landfills.

Personal and household hygiene products, however, don't usually have "sell by" dates, so they don't end up in the clearance bin quite as often. We do, though, have anecdotal evidence that there are some possible channels to explore – paper companies that toss cartons of product simply because the carton got dinged, beauty salons that toss product because it looks bad to put it on sale, products that get dinged and scuffed in transit. We're hoping to get more and better information on what might be available, so that we can re-purpose what would have been thrown out rather than buying new.

We don't have enough information about how cultural differences affect product distribution. We do know that there are differences in skin care and hair care needs across different ethnicities, but we don't really have a good handle on what other

cultural differences there may be, and how we might accommodate them. The PEPbase software can at least handle multiple languages – but we don't really know how to accommodate marked differences in the way that different people handle menstrual protection, housecleaning, toilet training, haircare, infant care....



And, as we've indicated earlier, we really need to look more deeply into usage patterns. Again, we have plentiful evidence from food pantries that most households need crisis help rather than long-term help; and we know that if we can get assistance to families as they enter poverty, rather than waiting until some arbitrarily defined span has passed to prove that they're in poverty, they get out of poverty quickly. Data so far seems to indicate the same thing for our households – but we need longer-term data to really complete the picture.

Finally, we need to see if we can figure out who else is out there. Right now, we're aware of two other agencies in Wisconsin, two in Maine, one in Massachusetts, one in Indiana, and one in Ohio. We're working to build links between us, and to share "best practice" information, so that we can start suggesting models that work, and advocating against strategies that don't work.

In the meantime, we'll continue with our ministry, focusing on the stuff that so often gets overlooked and passed by.

We have blessed by God with an abundance of gifts.  
In response, we share God's love and God's kingdom.

We are:

Helping with the essentials  
of personal and household hygiene,  
showing God's grace and love  
through these tangible gifts.