

Everyone Deserves a Welcome

For many neighbors, asking for food assistance can be a difficult and vulnerable step. They may arrive feeling anxious, uncertain, or concerned about how they will be treated.

Creating a welcoming environment can help ease those feelings and set the tone for a positive experience.

First impressions matter. From the moment a neighbor arrives, clear signage, friendly greetings, and an inviting space communicate that they are valued and respected. Simple touches—such as directional signs, multilingual welcome messages, and volunteers who smile and introduce themselves—can make a meaningful difference.

A welcoming environment is about more than hospitality; it helps remove barriers to access. When neighbors know where to go, understand what to expect, and feel comfortable asking questions, they are more likely to receive the support they need and return when they need help again.

Our Partners Are Creating Welcoming Experiences

Many of our Partner Agencies are already doing thoughtful things every day to help neighbors feel comfortable, respected, and valued. Here are just a few examples worth celebrating:

- Just Hope, Inc. in Hartsville goes above and beyond to make children feel special. Every student who participates in its backpack program receives a backpack filled with school supplies and shoes each school year. The organization also provides a special Christmas gift to each child.
- St. Vincent de Paul of Humphreys County hosts a large monthly perishable distribution in addition to its regular pantry hours. Every neighbor is greeted with a smile and kind words, helping people feel welcomed and valued from the moment they arrive. Their consistent, caring atmosphere has made the pantry a trusted source of joy and hope in the community.
- St. John Community Services in Martin continues to look for ways to improve the neighbor experience. Its choice pantry model gives neighbors the dignity of selecting the foods that best meet their families' needs while helping reduce waste. The model also gives staff more opportunities to focus on neighbor intake, identify additional needs, and connect people with other resources. At the same time, it has created new volunteer opportunities for college-age youth, including students from nearby UT Martin.

- The Branch creates a welcoming and dignified experience by providing privacy and taking time to understand each neighbor's needs beyond food assistance. Neighbors can relax in a comfortable space featuring vibrant murals created by members of the community before being guided through the choice pantry by a volunteer. The Branch also offers an online reservation system in English, Spanish, and Arabic, along with multilingual staff and volunteers, helping neighbors access information in a language they understand. Their full-choice pantry allows neighbors to select the foods that work best for their families, creating a more empowering experience.

These are just a few examples of the many ways our Partner Agencies are putting Neighbor Care into action. Whether it's a friendly greeting, a comfortable waiting area, the opportunity to choose food, multilingual resources, or simply taking time to listen, small acts of welcome can make a big difference.

Thank you to all of our Partner Agencies for creating spaces where every neighbor feels welcome, respected, and valued. Want to help make your space even more welcoming? Download one of our two new Welcome Posters, linked in the Neighbor Care Toolkit, or reach out to your Partnership Manager if you'd like a free printed version for your agency.