

Volunteers prepare hygiene kits for Omaha-area students

Omaha World-Herald
Omaha, Nebraska, US

Thursday, July 30, 2026
Page 3,4, Section: General
596 words, 138in² in size
58,514 circulation



JOSEPH CIEMBRONIEWICZ PHOTOS, THE WORLD-HERALD

Mat Steinlan, left, and Carlos Fernandez seal a box containing recently assembled Shine Bright kits, packages that contain essential hygiene items for students Wednesday in Council Bluffs. Shine Bright is a partnership between United Way of the Midlands, Omaha and Council Bluffs Public Schools, Papillion La Vista Schools, JAG Nebraska and other organizations.

Volunteers prepare hygiene kits for Omaha-area students

Shine Bright gives students products needed to feel confident as they return to school

LUNA STEPHENS
World-Herald Staff Writer

While school supplies are an essential part of preparing to go back to school, an Omaha program focuses on ensuring students also have the hygiene products they need to feel confident in the classroom.

More than 425 volunteers are packing 5,000 hygiene kits this week as part of Shine Bright, an initiative led by the United Way and partner organizations, said Shawna Forsberg, president and CEO of United Way of the Midlands.

On Wednesday at the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, volunteers gathered in assembly lines to pack bags with full-size hygiene products such as body wash, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, laundry detergent and feminine hygiene products.



Volunteers gather toothpaste to assemble Shine Bright kits, packages that contain essential hygiene products for students Wednesday in Council Bluffs.

The kits will be distributed to kindergarten, sixth- and ninth-grade students across the Omaha, Council Bluffs and Papillion La Vista school districts, as well as students statewide in the JAG Nebraska program.

The products in each kit vary based on age range, gender and hair texture, said Carly Weld, United Way's director of volunteerism.

Please see **HYGIENE**, Page A4



Hygiene

From A3

Weld said the group works closely with school staff to ensure the products offered are what students prefer. A survey found that 82% of students who received a kit felt more confident, Weld said.

“What it’s all about is supporting students and building confidence so that they can focus on academic achievement,” she said.

The Shine Bright program began six years ago after former Omaha Public Schools Superintendent Cheryl Logan told the United Way that some students returning to school after the pandemic weren’t having their hygiene needs met, Weld said.

“Just being informed and having conversations with our community and meeting those needs, that’s what makes Shine Bright special,” Weld said.

While many back-to-school giveaway programs focus on school supplies, Forsberg said



JOSEPH CIEMBRONIEWICZ PHOTOS, THE WORLD-HERALD

Volunteers put together Shine Bright kits Wednesday in Council Bluffs. Shine Bright is a partnership between United Way of the Midlands, Omaha and Council Bluffs Public Schools, Papillion La Vista Schools, JAG Nebraska and other organizations.

Shine Bright hopes to meet other needs that families may struggle to afford.

“For us, this was a unique way and an important way to help kids

be ready for school,” she said. “The backpacks they need with pencils and pens and all of that, that is also incredibly important. But this is a different way to help



Julie Fidler, left, and Gloria Gehrt assemble Shine Bright kits Wednesday in Council Bluffs.

them be prepared.”

School staff discreetly distribute kits to students they identify as in need, said Lisa Utterback, OPS’s chief officer of Student and Community Services.

Utterback said OPS is grateful for the organizations and community members behind the project

for investing in Omaha students.

“When your basic needs are being met, and you’re able to walk into school feeling confident from either hygiene or having a new backpack, it creates a different mindset for a child,” she said. “And we know that every child deserves that.”