

# Giving Choice: School Supplies and Personal Care

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Institute for Women's Leadership

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to *practice* leadership *through* action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

# Project Overview

Giving Choice: School Supplies and Personal Care is a two part social action project focused on providing school supplies to children in need and providing healthy personal care products to low-income women. The overarching project goal is to provide options of choice to those who are typically unable due to financial restriction.

# Five Loaves Food Pantry



- The only food pantry in New Brunswick that offers “client choice”
- Clients are allowed to choose what they want from each category of items
  - Protein, fruits/vegetables, pasta, canned goods, cereal, dairy, etc.
  - Amount of food a client can take home is dependent on the amount of people living in the household
- Five Loaves is the only pantry in the New Brunswick area that does not provide pre-packaged bags of groceries
  - Receiving a prepackaged bag of foods you might not necessarily like or may not even be familiar with can be disappointing and degrading
  - It’s a much more dignified experience when you’re allowed to choose what you want from a variety of food items

# School Supplies Background

## •New Brunswick U.S. Census Bureau Facts:

- Population of New Brunswick is 57,000 people
- 36% of people are living at or below the poverty line
- 20,520 people in New Brunswick are living at or below the poverty line

## •School Supplies Facts

- In 2017, Huntington Bank's Backpack Index reported that the average cost of school supplies for a child in elementary school was \$650.
- After being adjusted for inflation, the cost of school supplies in 2006 was \$375.
- The cost of school supplies is on the rise and that can be stressful for parents with low-income.



# Part One: Accessibility of School Supplies



Kristin helping two elementary school girls decide which color notebooks they would like. Photo taken on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

- Collected gently used school supplies from friends and family
- Received \$1,175 in donations via [gofundme](#)
- Surveyed pantry clients to determine which supplies were needed
- Purchased new school supplies with donation funds
- Set up a shelving unit to display school supplies
- Pantry clients given opportunity to shop the shelves for school supplies

# Part Two: Personal Care Products

## Objectives:

- Provide lower-income women with the option of using safer personal care products.
- Educate community members on questionable ingredients in personal care products, while shedding light on the lack of government regulation.



# My Personal Care Products:







**Ingredients:** propylene glycol,  
polyethylene, fragrance,  
methylparaben, propylparaben,  
butane, and octinoxate

# Personal Care Products Facts

## • Toxic Ingredients

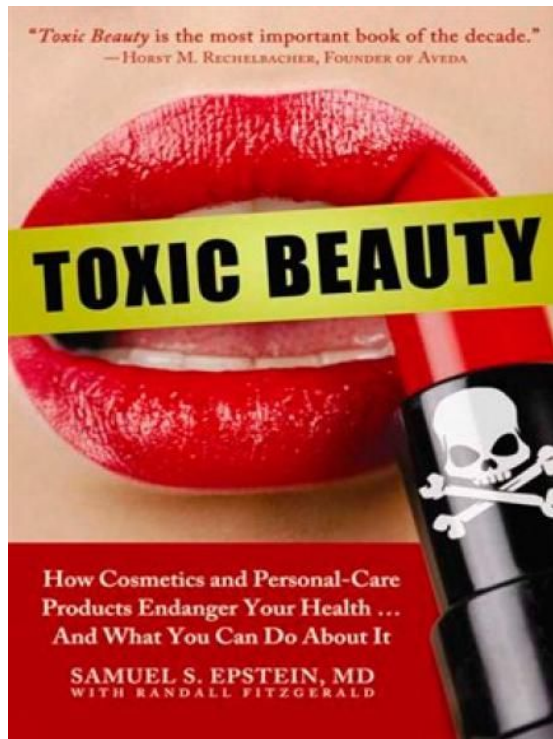


- Research has suggested cosmetologists, especially nail salon workers, experience higher rates of infertility and miscarriages, in addition to dermatitis and breathing problems, such as asthma. [New York Times](#)
- “Fragrance” could be >3,000 ingredients, some of which are endocrine-disrupting compounds and possible or known carcinogens. [Campaign for Safe Cosmetics](#)

## • Lack of Regulation in U.S.



- Cosmetic manufacturers are *NOT* legally required to report health problems associated with use of their products to the FDA. [Time](#)
- Canada and EU have banned or restricted >1,300 cosmetic ingredients; U.S. has only banned 11. [New York Times](#)



“We don’t actually need any more studies or scientific data to feel confident about these chemicals’ effects. We have reached the point where doing more studies becomes a superb excuse for inaction or delay on the part of industry, when they should be dealing with the problems that have already been identified.”

– Dr. Samuel S. Epstein, author of *Toxic Beauty*

# Part 2: Personal Care Products

## What I've Done So Far:

- Collected \$700 in donations via [gofundme](#)
- Purchased safer personal care products for people who visit Five Loaves Food Pantry
- Presented at an RU Compost club meeting
  - Educated members on personal care product ingredients
  - Taught club members how to make their own body lotion

## What I Plan to Do:

- Host an event at the Center for Great Expectations (a women's shelter in Somerset, NJ)
  - Discuss personal care product ingredients and possible health effects
  - Teach the women how to make their own personal care products

# Lessons Learned



Time management is not easy



Stepping out of your comfort zone is worth it in the long run



You're not alone when you're feeling overwhelmed



People will support you if you just ask

# Feminist Leadership

- This project allowed me to...
  - Go at my own pace
  - Acknowledge and recognize my privilege, while thinking critically
  - Interact with people of different backgrounds from my own, who I wouldn't normally interact with
  - Empathize with people who have much different experiences

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