

The FreeStore Story



Nov. 2017

Message from Free Store Chair Jeanie Smith

People can be frustrating and annoying! That's just the plain truth. They can also be kind and grateful and loving. We see them all at the FreeStore. The trick for us, as volunteers who serve people whose lives are messy at best and more likely even desperate, is to be as non-judgmental as we can.

A recent story illustrates this point and brings home to us how often we sit in judgment without knowing the facts. A woman I'll call Hannah was scheduled to come in to select her furniture. Our greeter (that's me in this case) arrived slightly before the scheduled time to make sure that the lights were on and things in order. Time went on and Hannah failed to appear. After about 45 minutes, I called her. I was probably less than polite. Hannah told me that her ride had canceled and she was trying to find another ride. We ended up rescheduling her appointment for the next day. Long story short, she failed to show up for the next appointment, after I had waited over an hour and a half. We did ultimately serve this client about three weeks later. When she did show up

for her appointment, I found that she was wheelchair-bound, had lost the first apartment that she thought she was moving into and had hired two men from Central Iowa Shelter and Services to help her with moving some of her other possessions from a storage unit. She was incredibly polite and grateful. She later called me to thank the FreeStore again and again for our furniture, our help and, most importantly, for our patience. Remembering how many times I had ground my teeth and cursed this woman to myself and how less-than-polite I was to her face made me ashamed.

The point here is that we have to remember that we don't know the backstory for any of our clients. What we do know is that they have been through traumatic times that most of us have been spared. We have to cut them some slack because, more often than we know, their lives are in chaos.

We do what we do because we believe in giving families a chance to start over. Part of that is restoring dignity in their lives. Giving them choices, sometimes for the first time in their lives. The furniture and household goods are great. Dignity and choice – those are priceless.

Another Successful Dressers for Kids Event

By Lois Kriebs

For the 5th year United Way of Central Iowa has chosen The FreeStore to feature in their Day of Action. The results have always been dressers, dressers and more dressers. The Elwell Building at the State Fairgrounds was the site where 125 volunteers put together 250 dressers during the morning of September 12. We are fortunate to repeatedly have John Deere employees as our Build Captains. The day before, employees from DuPont Pioneer did an excellent job of setting up all of the tables and everything else so we would be ready for action.

The entire event takes many volunteers and help from a number of companies: Mayflower Select Van & Storage, UPS, Keller & Associates and Patrick Porto as Master of Ceremony. Twelve different companies were represented by employees and The FreeStore also had twelve of their volunteers lending a helpful hand. Many thanks to all who participated: Pat yourself on the back for a JOB WELL DONE.



Behind the Scenes at the Warehouse

By Roger Munns

The job is to sort mountains of gently-used dinnerware and blankets and other household necessities, bundle them according to family size, and then do it over and over with new donations.

Tedious? Hardly.

“It’s like playing house, seeing everything that comes in and putting everything together in a way that looks right,” said volunteer Thérèse Canady. On a recent Tuesday at our warehouse, Canady was sorting through hundreds of mugs, tumblers, plates, bowls and other glassware.

Our clients really appreciate these things, and besides, it’s so much fun. You never know what you’re going to find,” she said.

Across the isle, Connie Rider

was tackling the latest donations—a mound of towels, sheets, blankets, pillowcases, washcloths and quilts.

“These are the sorts of fundamental items you need to make a home,” Rider said.

“I’ve watched clients come in and pick out their items. A lot of times, it’s so exciting for them that they can hardly think. This might be the first time in their lives that they get to pick out something for themselves,” she said.

Not all donations go to clients.

Tattered quilts and blankets go to an organization that distributes them to homeless people. Fine china, wine glasses, fragile glassware and personal items go to the St. Vincent De-Paul thrift store. Threadbare towels go to the Animal Rescue League. And of course, broken or otherwise unusable dona-

tions go to the dumpster.

“We do have our standards,” smiled Gloria Gray. On this day Gray was sorting pots, skillets, measuring cups, spatulas, ladles, and all manner of cookware.

“If we get a donation that looks really sharp, we get that up (to the main client shopping area) right away. I love doing this,” she said. “We are literally helping these people start over.”

Warehouse manager Judy Bloom said there is always room for additional sorting volunteers. Two-hour shifts are available every Tuesday and Friday. Call Judy at 641-799-6606.

Another in a series in what it takes to make the FreeStore work.



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