

The FreeStore Story

Spring 2021



A FreeStore Note

By Marty Rathje, Board Chair

The pandemic impacted all of us in ways we didn't imagine a year ago. Yet through it all we remained true to our mission; helping families start over. And as always, we did it completely with volunteers — no paid staff. The number of clients we served in 2020 decreased. Some of this was because we shut down for a number of weeks last spring. Many of our referring agencies also shut down and many of the reporting entities like schools or social agencies were either restricted from seeing clients or were also shut down. Despite all of this we still served 225 families, including 324 children. We served 93 domestic violence families.

As we look ahead, 2021 is starting off very busy as we are seeing a higher than usual number of clients. We know that needs of the people we serve didn't decrease and we suspect actually increased because of the pandemic. To continue our mission, our challenge is to secure enough donations of goods, to recruit more volunteers, and to make sure donations cover our growing expenses. You are receiving this newsletter because

you have supported our mission in the past. We are grateful.

How do we do this without paid staff? It takes literally thousands of hours of volunteer work to get it done. In just the first two months of 2021, our nine most-active people donated a total of about 1,100 hours. Many more volunteers donated additional hours.

For details, check out www.thefreestore.org and navigate to "annual reports" where you'll find our year-end review of 2020.

I want to take a moment here to remember the passing of Terry Swanson. Terry was part of the founding group of the FreeStore and has been an integral part of our charity over the years, serving up to the day of her death. She was a guiding light and inspiration for many of us. She is missed. Find more information about her elsewhere in the newsletter.

Thanks to each of you for what you do for the FreeStore. What we do changes lives and we can't do it without you.

Mike Smith Volunteer of the Year

Mike Smith has been named volunteer of the year by the FreeStore board of directors.



"Mike was everywhere this last year, doing everything from shoveling snow at the warehouse to loading and unloading trucks to driving for practically every pickup and delivery," said FreeStore board chair Marty Rathje.

Mike has been volunteering for thirteen years, ever since his retirement as an attorney in the office of the Iowa Attorney General, where he specialized in environmental and natural resource issues. He said Harry Swanson, one of the FreeStore founders, "tapped me on the shoulder right after I retired and said, 'Mike, I've got just the thing for you,' and he was right. I've been very fortunate in life and the FreeStore has turned out to be an excellent way of giving back."

When informed of the award, his first reaction was to name others who he thought were more deserving. "It's never an easy choice because the FreeStore runs solely on volunteers," said vice chair Diane Munns. "Mike has been especially helpful in the year of the pandemic. I appreciate his 'Yes, we can do that' approach to practically any task, and he goes about everything with such a sunny point of view."

Spring 2021 FreeStore Gift

Please return this portion in the envelope provided.

Your donations help pay for expenses such as warehouse rent, truck maintenance and fuel, furniture re-building supplies, and cleaning supplies for clients.

Yes! I want to help the FreeStore continue its work.

Name _____

Address _____

Email Address _____

My Gift: \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$200 Other \$ _____

Information on the other side explains how your tax-deductible gift can be anonymously leveraged up to 10 per cent by the Birdies for Charity program.

How We Use Your Contributions

Ever wonder how the FreeStore uses your contributions? Here are the main points:

- We rely exclusively on volunteers and the many thousands of hours they contribute. Our line item for salaries is zero.
- Half of our revenue comes from individuals and most of the rest comes from grants, churches, and modest fees to service agencies who refer clients to us. We don't receive any government funds.
- Our service is free to clients. The cost to us is over \$100,000, with the three largest expenses being warehouse rent and operation, truck maintenance, and items we purchase for clients.

Instead of hired employees, we have volunteers who drive our box trucks to collect donated furniture. Others load goods from our warehouse to deliver to clients. Others sort and bundle donations. Others schedule pickups and coordinate deliveries. There's a job for you if you'd like to join. Smiles guaranteed. Call 242-3733.

Our single largest expense is warehouse rent and operation, which was about \$34,000 last year. We have a modest centrally located warehouse supplemented by a smaller space for overflow needs. We spent about \$31,000 last year on a "new" truck, thanks in large part to special donations from the BWA Foundation and from Dick and Donna Bray. Maintenance for our trucks, including the '04 and '06 workhorses, was another \$16,000.

We also look for sales on items that our clients need to set up their households. Every year we use your donations to buy scores of vacuum cleaners, toasters, coffee pots, bed

frames, and microwave ovens. For example, we got a good buy on microwaves last year, buying 200 at \$40 each. We also buy brooms and buckets and cleaning supplies for every client. We even provide food for moving day.

Our income last year was about \$122,000, with a little more than half coming from individual donations. There is a form elsewhere in this newsletter that will help you make a tax-deductible donation to the FreeStore. You can leverage your gift with Amazon Smiles (visit [smile.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)) or with the Birdies for Charity program.

Longtime treasurer Larry Anderson said the charity is indebted to all the contributors "especially last year. Regardless of the turmoil, uncertainty and pain that 2020 brought each of us, you remained steadfast in your support of our work. We are grateful. We pledge to continue to use your gifts carefully and wisely."

In Appreciation of Terry Swanson

We would like to say a few words in appreciation of Terry Swanson, one of the FreeStore's founding members. Since its inception in 2001, Terry dedicated herself to helping grow the FreeStore from a small team with big ideas and good intentions to an organization that has touched thousands of people in our community.

Terry applied skills from her professional career, which ranged from math teacher to technical writer, to help define the FreeStore as we know it today. She was appalled by the stories of domestic violence victims and in early days she wrote grant proposals and helped secure a 501c3 rating,

making the FreeStore a nonprofit organization approved by the IRS as a tax-exempt, charitable organization. She used her writing and design skills to start this newsletter and to help create the first FreeStore website. She helped establish and document standardized practices to help the FreeStore scale and grow.

The daughter of a coal miner, Terry understood some of the struggles facing families with limited resources. Her experiences and empathy influenced her to initiate programs such as Clean Start, which offers cleaning supplies and a laundry basket to clients, and Meals for Moving Day, which

works with local restaurants to package unused food for clients to take home and have a hot

meal on moving day. In 2018, Terry was honored with the Service to Humanity Award from Blackburn College and the Iowa Volunteer of the Year award.

Terry served as board member, chairman, and continued scheduling clients until her death in December. Thank you, Terry, for your tireless commitment for all you have done for the FreeStore and in helping to lay the foundation for future growth.



Birdies for Charity

Many charities in central Iowa, including the FreeStore, partner with the Principal Charity Classic Golf Tournament's Birdies for Charity program. The FreeStore receives EVERY penny you donate. The Birdies program adds up to 10 per cent to your gift (at no cost to you). For example, your \$100 becomes as much as \$110 to help families start over. Write your check to the FreeStore and mail it in the envelope provided. We process the check and tell Birdies only the amount, not anything about the donor. Learn more at: principalcharityclassic.com/charity/birdies-for-charity

Please check here if you prefer to not take part in Birdies for Charity.