

The FreeStore Story

Fall 2021



A FreeStore Note

By Diane Munns, Board Chair

Hi, my name is Diane Munns. I am the new chair for the FreeStore but not new to the organization. I've volunteered for about 15 years and have done everything from warehouse work to client delivery. I'm succeeding Marty Rathje, who continues as the FreeStore operations manager, so his leadership is not lost to us. Many, many thanks to Marty for his work as board chair.

I recently watched a Netflix series called 'Maid.' It is the story of a young mother trying to escape poverty and abuse to make a better life for her daughter. She is smart and tireless, but her efforts are constantly derailed. Part of the problem is government red tape surrounding applications for help. But just as troubling for her are problems that most of us would overcome — finding affordable and safe housing, making a car repair, dealing with a sick child or an increase in rent. She flees to a shelter, twice, to receive support and refuge. I suspect many of our clients could tell similar stories. She is often derailed in her efforts by seemingly small things. In one scene she has to ask a stranger for \$3 to pay for gas to

get to a job. I highly recommend the series to those who want to better understand the struggle of poverty and abuse.

Which gets me to the FreeStore. We take away one of those hurdles — furnishing a home. Once the client has found an unfurnished home, we provide everything, a bed with sheets and pillows, dishes and pots and pans, televisions and microwaves, lamps, towels, dining room tables and chairs, rugs, dressers, cleaning materials, and even some food for moving day. These items are free to clients, and we deliver at no cost to them. This newsletter highlights a new mission, helping victims of sex trafficking to start over. It also shows a project by high school students to raise money and buy cleaning baskets.

We are grateful. You are receiving this newsletter because you have supported our mission in the past. What we do together changes lives and we can't do it without you. Thank you for your support and we hope you can continue in the future.

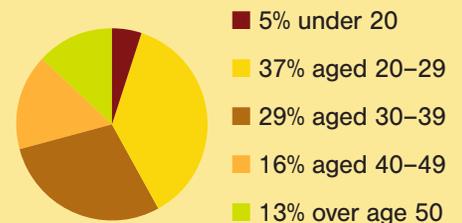
FreeStore By The Numbers

- 589 total served as of end of September 2021
- 395 total served comparable period in 2020, the Covid year
- 599 total served comparable period 2019

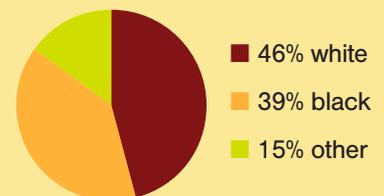
Head of household sex:

84% women

Head of household age:



Of total served through September:



Fall 2021 FreeStore Gift

Please return this portion in the envelope provided to:

**FreeStore, 1020 24th St.,
West Des Moines, IA 50266.**

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 percent by the Birdies for Charity program.

Help for Victims of Sex Trafficking

The FreeStore is now serving clients of Dorothy's House, which helps survivors of sex trafficking in Iowa. Director-founder Kellie Markey said our furniture bank has already helped several women to live independently for the first time. "It has made a huge difference for them. And it's not just the furniture and household goods that you provide. You also give them cleaning supplies like vacuum cleaners, which are hard to come by if you don't have money to pay for them," Markey said.

Her organization recently completed a new recovery house, which offers short-term residencies and programming. The house was furnished by the FreeStore. "You literally outfitted our house. It was a humongous gift," she said.

Markey said there are persistent misconceptions about victims

of sex trafficking. "People don't think it involves American women, but the fact is, it's pervasive and invisible. It is literally hidden in every neighborhood," with many victims also suffering from drug abuse and from connections to gangs.

She said victims are not always ready for the rigors of recovery. "It's really important to change the way we look at success. For many women, they have suffered a lifetime of adversity and it will be a lifetime of healing. But I can tell you that every single person who has come in contact with Dorothy's House has left knowing that someone cares about them in a way that is not a transaction."

For more information, visit dorothyshouse.org.

Cookies for Cleaning Supplies

Kudos to the Key Club, a Johnston High School service club that held a bake sale this fall that raised about \$400 for the FreeStore. Their faculty leader, librarian Ruth Thoreson, said she visited the FreeStore warehouse to deliver donations and became intrigued with the mission of helping families start over. "I shared your mission with the students and they wanted to help," she said.

"They jumped on it right away. They did a good job at the bake sale, explaining that proceeds will go to helping families that are starting over," Thoreson said. To drive home the message, the kids decided to use the money to buy laundry baskets of cleaning supplies. Every FreeStore client gets a basket.

"I assembled a cleaning basket and we had it sitting there at the sale," she said. "Our cookies were good but they weren't THAT good. When the kids explained what they were doing, a lot of customers put out a 20 and said keep the change. I'm really proud of the kids," she said.

What a great example of how a small thing can make a big difference. These baskets includes dish soap, laundry detergent, hand towels, toilet paper, toilet bowl brush, clothes hangers, a cleaning bucket, and more.



Volunteers Make it Happen

We're often asked how many volunteers are needed to support the FreeStore mission. As you know, the FreeStore operates without paid staff, meaning every dollar donated to us is used to serve clients.

About 140 active volunteers contribute to our annual operations.

Of those, about 30 have regular duties deemed critical to its operation. These are the people who show up weekly to pick up donations, sort and clean the goods, and deliver to clients. Our behind-the-scene workers are critical, too, like those who write grants, repair donated goods, tend to the trucks, keep our records, maintain the website and perform countless other mission-critical responsibilities. Ten of our volunteers together logged 1700 hours in the first couple months of 2021. Our board members give on average between 8 and 30 hours per week. We could not operate without them.

We have several goals regarding volunteers. One is to get more of them.

Are you interested in donating perhaps three hours a week? The reward comes in camaraderie and smiles. Dial 282-3733 and leave a message. Or contact us at info.thefreestore@gmail.com.

Another goal is to reduce the burden and avoid burnout for our most active volunteers.

Our strategy sessions on this issue have led us to compile job descriptions, succession planning, and splitting duties. We're also using technology to schedule volunteers and we're moving toward use of Quikbooks to streamline financial operations.

These tools give relief to volunteers who previously completed tasks manually, but they also cost money to implement. This is where your donations help us transition to a more efficient and sustainable business.



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 percent 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.