

The FreeStore Story

Spring 2022



A FreeStore Note

By Diane Munns, Board Chair

One of our pickup teams had a surprise this spring as they arrived at a home where a woman was donating some gently used furniture. Part of the routine is to give the donor some literature about us in the off chance that he or she isn't familiar with our mission.

"Oh, I don't need any of that," said the woman as she took a quick glance at our flyer. And then she said, "I know all about you. You saved my life." Turns out years ago she fled an abusive home in a hurry, saving nothing. After spending time in a shelter, she was ready to resettle in a new, safe place but she didn't have a single possession. Enter the FreeStore, which lets clients pick out the furniture and household goods

they need to start their lives over. The goods are then delivered immediately, all at no cost to the client, and all done by volunteers. This person's situation wasn't that unusual, especially for victims of abuse. But it's rare to run across someone who had that experience and who now advocates for us. "I tell all my friends that when they have something to give away, they should give it to the FreeStore," she said.

Keep the donations coming. If you have gently used furniture and household goods, leave a message at the warehouse – (515) 282-3733—and we'll schedule a pickup. There's no charge, but we appreciate monetary donations as well. You are receiving

this newsletter because you have supported our mission in the past. What we do changes lives and the need continues. Thank you for your support and thanks in advance for whatever you can give via the enclosed envelope. Prefer to donate electronically? It's easy to find the donate page on thefreestore.org.

Elsewhere in this newsletter are articles highlighting our hands-on corporate team at Bankers Trust and our volunteers of the year Ellen MacRoy and Bill Brentano. These volunteers not only give us countless hours, they also give energy that rubs off on the rest of us. Thanks!

Volunteers Needed!

Having no paid staff means all work is done by volunteers. We need more help. We especially need loaders, lifters and drivers. No special license is needed and it doesn't take long to check you out on our box trucks. If you have any time, weekdays or weekends, we will find a place for you. Our mission – helping people start

over – is what attracts our volunteers. The camaraderie is what keeps them coming back. Smiles guaranteed.

For more information on volunteering, see thefreestore.org or call (515) 282-3733 and leave a message.



The Bankers Trust team. See other side.

Spring 2022 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.

Challenges Past and Future

Thanks to our donors plus scores of volunteers and – as always – **zero paid staff**, the FreeStore had a recovery year in 2021. Some of our referring agencies were either shut down or restricted from seeing clients, and some FreeStore volunteers opted to stay home because of Covid concerns. Even so, there were significant increases in both client activity and donations compared to 2020.

We served 317 families, including 405 children, which is nearly 100 more families than we were able to help in 2020, the Covid year. We served 101 domestic violence families last year and we expanded our mission to start serving victims of sex trafficking through relationships with Dorothy's House in Des Moines and Youth Shelter Services in Ames.

The FreeStore gathers gently used donated furniture and household goods, then gives it to clients referred to us by

social service agencies. The clients pick what they need to start over, and we deliver that same day to their homes. The service is free to clients while referring agencies pay a small fee.

Our income for 2021 was over \$131,000, an increase of about \$9,000 from the previous year. Sixty-five percent of our income came from individuals, with most of the rest coming from grants, churches, and fees. As always, our single largest expense is warehouse rent, which this year has increased significantly to reflect market rates. Another major expense is to resurface our crumbling parking lot. Inflation will also impact our expenses for truck maintenance and purchases for clients.

For more details, visit thefreestore.org and navigate to the 2021 annual report.



Volunteers of the Year

Ellen MacRoy manages the kitchenware portion of our warehouse, sorting and grouping small appliances, baking items, flatware and such. She also assembles the Clean Start baskets that go to every client. While shopping for those items, she keeps a keen eye for bargains, like the time a few months ago when she spotted microwaves at 40 percent off the regular price. We never have enough microwaves for clients. We bought 200 of them.

"She's a super shopper," said Marty Rathje, the FreeStore operations manager.

Bill Brentano's corner of the warehouse is a well-appointed workshop where wobbly chairs get sturdy, where table tops are refinished, and where all donated electronics get tested before they're displayed for clients. As Ellen puts it, "Everything has to pass the Bill test." He's also in charge of maintaining our three workhorse box trucks, one of which is nearly 20 years old.

This husband-wife team has been chosen volunteers of the year for the FreeStore. "We like the idea of giving back to society," said Ellen. "And with the FreeStore, you feel like you're making an impact. But it's more than that. There's a reward for us, too. It's a joy and a privilege to be there."

Bill echoed those thoughts. "The people we're helping really need help, so when they get furniture or electronics from us, it's important to make sure it's clean and functional. The clients have other things to worry about."

Rathje said both Bill and Ellen logged well over 500 hours volunteering last year. "But the time doesn't begin to describe the impact Bill and Ellen have on our clients and operations. We're lucky to have them at the FreeStore."

Bankers Trust Saturdays

Every second Saturday morning our warehouse lights up with volunteers from Bankers Trust in Des Moines. Their job is to guide our clients through the process of picking out furniture and furnishings, loading it all in our box trucks, and delivering to the client's new home.

"We started doing it in 2013," said their leader Rachel McGrew, who is also a FreeStore board member. "It's our goal of giving back to those less fortunate," she said. "Some of these clients have never had their own furniture. When you see the appreciation on their faces, it makes it worthwhile."

She said other corporations or civic groups could consider similar shifts. Each shift requires a couple of drivers, a greeter, and a loader or two. On most "delivery" days, there are two or three clients. It takes about three hours to load and deliver all the goods.

"Moving day isn't glamorous, so at the office we sell it as a way to get together and network outside of work. It's for the camaraderie," she said.



Volunteers make it happen at the FreeStore, including kids. Pictured left, one of our pint-sized volunteers proudly carries a cleaning basket that will go on the truck. She's part of a volunteer group from Bankers Trust.

For more information on volunteering, see thefreestore.org or call (515) 282-3733 and leave a message.



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.