

Spring • 2024

# The FreeStore Story

**FreeStore**  
Helping Families Start Over



## Chair's Message

By Diane Munns, Board Chair

One way to think about the record number of families served by the FreeStore last year is to think, Wow, how did we do that at no cost to clients and without paid staff? Client activity was up nearly 25 percent in 2023, with 505 families receiving furniture and other household goods to "start over" in a new place to live. Elsewhere in the newsletter, you'll see a chart of our 2023 activities and a note from a former client that makes the numbers real.

The way we did it, of course, was to ask more and more from our volunteers. We ask them to collect more and more furniture donations, to add more and more clients to our "delivery" shifts, and to do more and more behind the scenes work. The application process for our service was improved immeasurably last year, thanks in large part to our volunteers of the year, Bryan and Carol Litscher. Learn more about them elsewhere in the newsletter.

In 2023 we were finally able to replace our creaky and cranky 20-year-old box trucks with new models, thanks to a generous gift from the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation. The new trucks are safer and more efficient to operate, and now that they've been stenciled, they help carry our message of helping families start over.

Another reason we're able to meet the 25 percent growth in client demand is the continued help we get from you, our central

Iowa community. More and more of you are bringing donations to our warehouse (841 11th St., Des Moines) or calling us to come fetch bigger items from your homes, which we do at no cost. More and more of you are volunteering as well. We have about 120 volunteers who last year reported working about 10,500 hours. There are lots of opportunities for more. We need loaders, drivers, warehouse arrangers, donation sorters, furniture repair people, work-from-home schedulers, and many more. Interested? Send a note to [info.thefreestore@gmail.com](mailto:info.thefreestore@gmail.com), or check us out on Facebook.

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We also ask you for donations but we try not to be pests about it. This newsletter is the only way we ask for funds, and we do it just twice a year. We don't need to pay for staff, since nobody at the FreeStore is paid, but we do have significant expenses, especially for warehouse rent, truck maintenance, and supplies for clients. Sixty-four percent of our cash revenues last year came from individuals like you. Thank you for that, and thanks for whatever you can do going forward.



*The FreeStore's annual meeting is April 29, 5 p.m., at the warehouse, 841 11th St., Des Moines. All are welcome.*

## Our New Look

The FreeStore has upgraded its appearance. Our logo now has a white background and the word "FreeStore" is restyled. The charity also has a new color palette dominated by light green, replacing a gold color that served us well in the 20 some years since the FreeStore was created.

To mark the occasion, the printed version of this newsletter is in full color. We'll return to the familiar black and white version in our next mailing at Thanksgiving time. Color versions of this and previous newsletters are posted at [thefreestore.org](http://thefreestore.org). Board chair Diane Munns said the time was right to modernize our charity's appearance since decisions were already needed on how to stencil the new trucks. "We appreciate the work of designer Angela Griner of Wink & Nod Creative, who provided lots of options and guided us through the process," Munns said.



*New look, new trucks, same mission!*

## Spring 2024 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 household supplies for clients.*

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

*Information on the reverse side explains how the Birdies for Charity program matches up to 10 percent of your tax-deductible gift.*

# Volunteers of the Year

When Carol and Bryan Litscher started volunteering at the FreeStore several years ago, a couple of things were quickly obvious. One, it was fun to work there – they are regulars on Friday mornings – and two, the process to apply for FreeStore assistance was cumbersome. “It plain didn’t work,” Bryan said. “The advocate would fill out the form but it would be missing a key element and we’d have to send it back, and you could have a long back-and-forth before we could help a client.”

Enter Bryan, a freelance programmer for mailing and shipping systems. With input from client advocates and FreeStore officials, Bryan developed a web-based application system that requires accurate information before each section can be completed.

“What a marvelous change,” said FreeStore board member Peg Smith, who had lots of experience with the older system. “The new form saves a lot of time. When advocates are done with the form, they know exactly what to expect when they bring the client to the warehouse.”

Meanwhile, Carol is a warehouse sorter. Every time she comes in, there will be cardboard



The volunteers of the year, Carol and Bryan Litscher

boxes or plastic bags filled with donated linens, kitchenware, and all manner of goods. Her job is to make decisions on what to keep, what to repair, what to give to other charities, and what to discard.

The Litschers said they appreciate the FreeStore’s mission. “I talk to advocates and they say it’s really important to have a one-stop shop to provide furnishings,” Bryan said. “In other cities the advocates have to run around to garage sales or thrift stores to find household items, which takes a lot of time. Here, they can do it in one visit. It allows advocates to focus on the important things, like helping the client get a job or recover from trauma.”

The Litschers have been named volunteers of the year. Their daughter Kate services the FreeStore’s Facebook page.

## A Note of Thanks

We recently got a note from a woman letting us know how much the FreeStore meant to her. She said:

*“Due to health concerns it became an urgent situation for me to get moved into an apartment. Since I had been living in a camper van for the last four years, I had very little of what I needed to set up a household. You went above and beyond in helping me, and I just want you to know how much it means to me.”*

We are thankful we were able to be there when needed.

## FreeStore by the Numbers

	2023	%	2022	%
<b>Total Families</b>	<b>505</b>		<b>395</b>	
Adults	632		470	
Children	753		482	
<b>Women/men ratio</b>	<b>68%/32%</b>		<b>73%/27%</b>	
<b>Estimated value of goods</b>	<b>\$929,000</b>		<b>\$785,000</b>	
<b>Operating Revenue</b>	<b>\$227,675</b>		<b>\$167,412</b>	
Individuals	\$146,016	64%	\$124,780	75%
Agency Fees	\$27,829	12%	\$18,705	11%
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$170,104</b>		<b>\$140,254</b>	
Warehouse	\$66,594	39%	\$67,777	48%
Truck maintenance	\$22,717	13%	\$16,544	12%
Purchases for clients	\$33,132	19%	\$32,304	24%
<b>Salaries</b>	<b>\$0</b>		<b>\$0</b>	

## When It’s Time to Upgrade...

A year ago Drake University was trying to figure out what to do with truckloads of furniture from a residence hall that was being converted into a student center. Sustainability coordinator Hannah Remke said she “looked around for people who needed a lot of furniture and who were in the business of giving it away to people in need. I stumbled on to the FreeStore and I’ve been happy with the result.”

The FreeStore has been happy as well. The charity has also received truckloads of goods from hotels, Simpson College, Prairie Meadows Casino, funeral homes, and other institutions that are upgrading inventory. Leave a message at (515) 282-3733 or email [info.thefreestore@gmail.com](mailto:info.thefreestore@gmail.com) if you have items to donate.



Drake University’s sustainability coordinator Hannah Remke posing next to a truckload of furniture donated by Drake.

## 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.

Learn more at: [principalcharityclassic.com/charity/birdies-for-charity](http://principalcharityclassic.com/charity/birdies-for-charity)

