

The FreeStore Story

FreeStore
Helping Families Start Over



Chair's Message

By Gloria Gray, Board Chair

It is truly my honor and pleasure to serve as the FreeStore's Board of Directors chairperson. It has been a long journey for the FreeStore since the early days. I remember when Children and Families of Iowa was asked if it would refer families when they were ready to leave the domestic violence shelter and move into an unfurnished apartment or house. I said yes. I was CEO of that agency then, and for many years. When I retired in early 2015, I became a warehouse worker at the FreeStore.

Demand Remains High

Year through Aug	Families Served
2024	334
2023	335
2022	237
2021	219

In the FreeStore's first year, 2001, we operated from a one-car garage and we served seven families. Fast forward to today. Last year we provided furniture and household goods to over 500 families, including nearly 800 children. That was an astonishing 25% client growth over the year before. The pace has not slowed at all this year. And now we have a 10,500 square foot warehouse.

None of this would be possible without years of dedicated volunteers, or without you, our loyal donors of furniture, household goods, and cash! Thank you for partnering with us. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will see how we use your contributions. There is a form at the bottom of this page that you can use to make a donation. If you'd rather make a paperless contribution, check out the "donate" button at thefreestore.org.

Dressers and Tables

Two of the FreeStore's most-requested items are small drop-leaf dining room tables and small dressers for kids, meaning we're always in the market for more. Enter **Wells Fargo**, which this fall bought 50 kits for tables and another 200 kits for the little dressers. The company also set aside a large space at its Jordan Creek campus and invited employees to help assemble the kits. About a hundred employees took the challenge, some for a few hours, some for more.

"We're glad to help," said the company's Britney Appelgate. "The work you do fits nicely with our mission of helping to develop sustainable communities and affordable housing."

Another major gift this year—\$10,000 to buy more dressers—came from **Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino**. See thefreestore.org to see a list of major corporate grants.



Major Grant Appreciated

The Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation has approved a grant of \$52,000 to make critical improvements to the FreeStore warehouse. The grant will enable the purchase and installation of industrial heaters, and improved electrical, lighting, and ventilation systems.

"Volunteers and clients alike will appreciate the improvements, especially the replacement of weak heaters that leave everyone shivering in winter," said FreeStore grants coordinator Jeanie Smith. "This will make our space safer and more comfortable," she said. Two years earlier the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation provided a separate grant that helped cover the cost of two new box trucks, replacing vehicles that were about 20 years old.

Fall 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.

New Look, Same Mission

If you haven't been to the FreeStore warehouse lately, you likely would not recognize it. For years the first thing greeting clients was a wall of mattresses stored on shoulder-height shelves. Hidden down below were dining room tables and chairs that clients couldn't see without wrestling them into the aisles. "We did the best we could with limited space, but it wasn't very welcoming," said client greeter-in-chief Peg Smith.

All that changed when the FreeStore learned that adjacent space was available to rent. Volunteer Teresa Smith (no relation to Peg Smith) took a special interest in reorganizing the

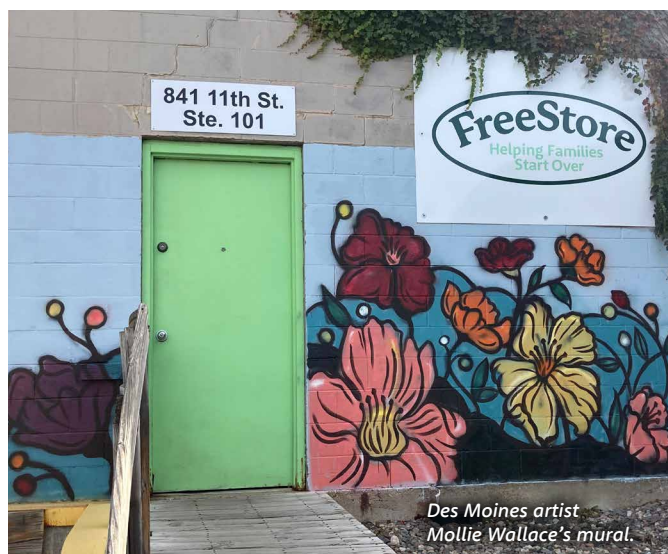


entry space and making it a showroom. The first decision was to move all the mattresses and all the industrial shelving units to the new space, accessible but out of sight.

Now visitors can see at a glance what we have to offer—tables and chairs down the middle, linens and lamps and kitchen things toward the back, decorating items and rugs to the left, and living room chairs and couches to the right.

Outside, Des Moines artist Mollie Wallace painted an Iowa flower scene on both sides of the entrance. "With the artwork and interior changes, we now have an attractive and calming place for our clients to shop," Peg Smith said.

The new space makes financial sense as well. The additional space provides more room at less cost than the off-site storage units we've needed for years.



Making a Difference

Advocates for our clients play a critical role in finding help for families recovering from domestic abuse or other trauma, and they're frequently on hand to witness the result. Here's a sample note:

"Dear FreeStore Volunteers, this past year your work has furnished at least 15 homes for families in the West Des Moines School

District. I have witnessed families joyfully celebrating and showing dignity in their body language. I was even fed by one family using new dishes from you. You have made their lives much better."

It was signed by Dan Stoa of his school's family engagement team.

Spending Your Donations

You might wonder what the FreeStore does with your financial donations. Since there is no paid staff, nearly every donated dollar goes for client service. Warehouse rent is the top expense, followed by expenses to support the three trucks we use to pick up furniture donations and to deliver goods to families at no cost to them.

The next largest need is buying items for clients. Every year hundreds of central Iowans donate clean and gently-used couches and dressers and rugs and dish sets—all of which we give to clients for free—and every year we run short of the need. Our volunteers are constantly on the lookout for bargain prices on vacuum sweepers and toasters and counter-top microwaves that we buy by the dozens. We never have enough donated pots and pans and linens either, so we go shopping. Dining room tables and small dressers for kids and bed frames are always in short supply.

We have cash for these things because of your generous donations and because none of your dollars go for staff salaries. But donated furniture and other items are still the most cost effective way for us to meet client needs.

If you have gently-used household goods, we'll fetch them for free. Call 515-282-3733 and leave a message. Or you can bring them to the warehouse at 841 11th Street on Tuesday, Friday or Saturday mornings between 9 and 11.

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

