

# The FreeStore Story

**FreeStore**  
Helping Families  
Start Over



## Chair's Message

By Diane Munns, Board Chair

It is Thanksgiving season, a time to recognize our blessings and an opportunity to help those less fortunate. We are thankful for the support you provide us, whether through your financial gifts, items donated or word of mouth advertising to your neighbors and community about the FreeStore. You recognize the vital service provided by the FreeStore in our community. We value your gifts and we think we carefully use them.

The FreeStore provides a niche service and is successful only if the system works on either side of us, namely the agencies vetting and preparing clients to start over, and an affordable apartment or home ready to receive our service. This newsletter highlights our role as a furniture bank, providing household goods for people who are starting

over. Elsewhere in the newsletter there's information on how schools identify families in need. And Donna's story demonstrates how we stepped in when she was ready to start over. As you can see, the need continues to grow.

My ask in this Thanksgiving season is for your continued support of the FreeStore, however you can give. There's a donation form and a return envelope elsewhere in the newsletter. If you prefer to make a financial gift online, follow the prompts under the "Donate" link on our website, [thefreestore.org](http://thefreestore.org).

But in addition, please think of ways you can also support the agencies and institutions necessary to make our work a success. It truly does take a village. Thank you during this special giving season.

## Volunteers Make it Happen

Looking for a volunteer team-building activity? A group of real estate agents from **Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices First Realty** assembled furniture kits at the warehouse this summer. They also made a donation. Many thanks. Your group is welcome, too. Send an email to [info.thefreestore@gmail.com](mailto:info.thefreestore@gmail.com) or leave a message at 515.282.3733.



## Finally, a Home

At last, Donna has reason to cheer. After escaping a toxic relationship, and more than once fleeing with none of her possessions, she stayed with her mother for a while, then stayed with two of her adult daughters. This summer a local service agency found an unfurnished apartment for her. "All I needed was everything you need to make a home," said Donna, not her real name. She found what she needed at the FreeStore warehouse and volunteers took it to her apartment. The service is free to FreeStore clients. A day later she had everything arranged and said she was tickled. "You FreeStore people went way above and beyond. I'm so blessed. It was so nice to make my apartment a home," she said.

See the latest developments at the FreeStore on our Facebook page, [FreeStoreWarehouseDSM](https://www.facebook.com/FreeStoreWarehouseDSM).

## Volunteers Needed!

More than 40 FreeStore volunteers gathered for a sunset potluck at our warehouse recently. "Helping families start over is our mission and we certainly have a good time doing it," said organizer Kevin Nelson. Interested in joining our all-volunteer charity? We need drivers, loaders, schedulers, sorters, cleaners, client greeters and many others. Email us at [info.thefreestore@gmail.com](mailto:info.thefreestore@gmail.com) or leave a message at 515.282.3733. Or come to the



warehouse (841 11th St. Des Moines) any Tuesday, Friday or Saturday morning and we'll show you around.

## Fall 2025 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.

# How We Use Your Dollars

The FreeStore has no paid employees, meaning nearly every donated dollar goes to client service. The largest expense is rent for our Des Moines warehouse featuring a showroom where clients personally choose items they need to furnish a home. The service is free to clients. Volunteers then deliver those items right away via the FreeStore's three box trucks. Fuel, maintenance, insurance and other needs for those trucks account for another significant expense.

The next largest need is to fill the gap between the amount of items you donate and the amount we need for clients. Most of the goods we need, especially the big pieces like beds and couches and dressers, are donated. At least three times a week our two-person teams collect gently-used goods and bring them to the warehouse to be sorted, repaired, and offered to clients. If you have items you'd like us to fetch (at no cost to you) follow the "Donate" prompt at [thefreestore.org](http://thefreestore.org), or leave a message at 515.282.3733 to arrange a pickup. Or you can bring items to the warehouse (841 11th St. in Des Moines) on Tuesday, Friday or Saturday mornings between 9 and 11.



*Two of our volunteer shoppers pose next to small appliances that we purchase for clients.*

Donated items often do not keep pace with the need, so we use your financial gifts to shop for bargains on counter-top microwaves, vacuum sweepers, crock pots, bed frames, toasters, kid dresser kits, bunk bed kits, dish sets, sheet sets, and laundry baskets full of cleaning supplies.

Another way to help is to do the shopping yourself, online. We have put together an Amazon "FreeStore Wish List" that lists low-cost items that we need for clients. For example, a queen mattress sheet set costs about \$23. The items will be delivered to your address and you can then bring them to the warehouse during regular warehouse hours. The wish list URL is at <https://a.co/a9ORfEc>.

## Brisk Pace Continues

The record setting pace of the last two years at the FreeStore is continuing through the first nine months of 2025. "An average of nine to 11 families a week are shopping at our warehouse showroom to find what they need to set up a new home," said operations manager Marty Rathje. "At that rate, we're once again likely to serve more than 500 families this year."

The makeup of families served has changed. In 2024 the charity helped dozens of refugee families set up

households in the Des Moines area, but early this year that flow came to a halt due to policies of the new federal administration. Several other categories of families, such as homeless youth and survivors of domestic violence, are growing compared to 2024.

All clients are required to have advocates, such as a social service agency or a church. So far this year, the FreeStore has worked with 31 agencies, which is similar to recent years.

## Demand Remains High

Year through September	Total families	Adults in those families	Children in those families	Needy	Youth	DV
2023	386	477	541	199	29	92
2024	405	568	632	224	25	73
2025	381	521	622	208	37	80

## Helping Schools Help Kids

An increasing number of families are referred to the FreeStore from Des Moines area schools.

"Sometimes we find out that a family is in distress when a child mentions that he doesn't have a bed," said Dan Stoa, the family support coordinator for West Des Moines Schools.

In other cases, the family might be split up, staying in homes of friends or relatives. In one case, he said, the family was sleeping in a car, moving from one church parking lot to another. Or the family might have a home but very few furnishings. "Our job is to connect families to community resources," he said, such as shelters or health care providers that can use various programs to find and pay for housing.

From the beginning of 2024 until August of this year, the FreeStore helped 65 families that were referred by public schools. That number includes 102 kids in 2024 and 52 children through this past August.

Like all clients to the FreeStore, families referred by schools visit the warehouse and pick out items they need. The furniture is loaded on trucks and delivered right way, all at no cost to clients.

"I really appreciate that families have the shopping experience – it's empowering for them – and the delivery part is essential. None of these families could do it themselves," Stoa said.

He said client families are often overwhelmed with gratitude. "I have witnessed families joyfully celebrating and showing dignity in their body language," he said.

"Our focus is on the children and there's no doubt that school performance will benefit when you have a real bed and the adults have a real place to prepare food," he said.



## 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)