



# MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AT

Christina S. steps out of her building, braving the chilly winter breeze. It's a mild day, but even still she is thankful to have to make one less stop on the bus today. Previously, she would have at least a 3-mile trip with grocery bags in hand. The cold is a reminder of how difficult it can be for her and her neighbors to get out of the house - many of whom struggle with transportation, mobility, or are homebound.

"You guys are a lifesaver, you really are. The staff work hard, I give them credit," said Christina. "They come out of their way just to do stuff for us at my building."

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# EMBRACING THE FOOD PANTRY ON-THE-GO

BY MATT UNGER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



As you might remember from our last issue of The Voice, we focused on the people behind the numbers of assistance we report. Many across the food pantry network face a lot of unique situations and often many barriers to accessing assistance. We try to make a real intentional effort to eliminate those barriers where and when we can. One of those barriers that is pretty common is the inability for someone to make it to a food pantry in person. Two ways we have been able to impact this, and their evolution, are highlighted in this issue - delivery and our mobile food pantry.

For many years now, starting with the first vehicle in 2016, we have operated a mobile pantry program. The concept was to operate a sort of pantry on wheels that visitors could still actually walk through and shop. These units could be taken to areas that were far from a pantry or had some kind of built-in audience present that would benefit from being able to visit the mobile pantry. Many folks found the mobiles to be the option that worked best for them - especially in 2020.

During the pandemic, our mobiles were staged outdoors and were viewed as a safer way by many to receive pantry assistance through that time.

It was in this moment that we also started our first home delivery program. It started as a completely volunteer-driven (pun intended) delivery methodology that then pivoted to a partnership with DoorDash and its fleet of delivery drivers. What started as a way to meet the challenges for those who were immunocompromised or just fearful of being in public at the time, grew into a regular DMARC program that now assists well over 300 people regularly each month. We recently shifted back to volunteer drivers making deliveries (thanks to the many of you who have signed up to do so!) and see the program continuing to grow and evolve.

These are just a couple methods by which we try to eliminate transportation barriers for folks in need. There are so many additional challenges we hear about and see across the pantry network whether that be having open hours when someone can access a pantry (we have several in our network that are open both during weekday daytime hours and have some evening and weekend hours), having the right kinds of foods that they are used to eating in their specific cultures (we work hard to have multiple cultural foods available and more universal produce items), or needing additional assistance available from other organizations to meet other needs (we work with other organizations to be on site from time to time at various network pantry locations).

It takes all of us – nonprofit organizations, government programs, and individual community members – to ensure we are creating a thriving community for all. I remain incredibly grateful for all you each do to inch us closer to that kind of community every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Unger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

# SHEILA NELSON

Sheila’s volunteer experience at DMARC started out small. Recently retired, she was looking for social opportunities in the community. Five years later, she now finds herself as an active member of the DMARC Board of Directors and a huge part of the success of our signature event, Spring Greens.

Nelson began volunteering in high school and later became a trained social worker. Then life got busy.

“What initially impressed me so much about DMARC is how important dignity is for the people who use the service. The priority is them as people,” Said Nelson. “I’ve been in situations in the past where the good deeds are done to pat yourself on the back and it is not like that at DMARC.”

What started as sorting foods and stuffing envelopes a couple days a week turned quickly into a more active role in helping solicit auction items for Spring Greens. At first the task felt quite daunting. Today she is comfortable leading other volunteers.

“Asking people for donations is hard for me. It’s out of my comfort zone. But I also volunteer at the pantry and that’s when I’m reminded of why you are doing it.”

You can join Sheila on the Spring Greens annual planning committee too! Contact Leslie Garman at [LGarman@dmarcunited.org](mailto:LGarman@dmarcunited.org).



# 2023

by the numbers

## 65,219

INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED

## 23 TIMES

NUMBER OF TIMES THE RECORD WAS  
BROKEN FOR BUSIEST DAY ON RECORD.

## OVER 1 IN 3

WERE 17 YEARS OR YOUNGER

## NEARLY 1 IN 4

CITY OF DES MOINES RESIDENTS  
UTILIZED A DMARC PANTRY

*...continued from cover*

In October 2023, the mobile food pantry program was reintroduced as the DMARC-ket Food Pantry On-the-Go with a new mobile unit built from the ground up. The new vehicle is better equipped for navigating tight driveways and spaces like Christina's building.



Service can be offered at the window by simply filling out a ticket.

As the end of the pandemic brings new challenges for many, these alternatives to a permanently placed pantry continue to expand access to healthy food options for many lowans.

### **Answering the call**

Rosemary Thierer puts her headset on and tucked into her usual corner of the DMARC offices. Within a few short moments of the clock striking 9 a.m. the phone begins to ring. Rosie calmly walks the caller through the script of questions and answers their questions about the process. A woman who recently moved into a senior living facility was given the hotline number by her caseworker. The caller reiterates how thankful they are that “Today I won’t have to worry about **one more thing**”.

Since Rosie started volunteering in 2021 this is a pretty typical interaction. She has heard time and time again the difference it can make for the person on the other end. These calls sometimes leave her lost for words.


“I had a call from a social worker at one of the hospitals. This veteran had just been diagnosed with cancer and he was calling to see if he could get a home delivery. He and his wife were living off like 24,000 a year. I'm sitting there thinking ‘oh my gosh....

How do you do that?’” said Thierer.

**July 2016 -**  
DMARC Mobile food pantry starts.







***“You guys are really a life saver. These people work hard.”***

*- Christina S.  
Mobile Food Pantry visitor*

Initially, she would be taking 2-3 calls a day and more recently that has grown to 9-10 calls each morning.

“A number of folks will say I talked to this social worker or I came to this apartment complex and they told me about this. So the word is getting out to those providers,” said Thierer.

Nationwide, food pantries and food banks have seen the value that providing alternatives to a brick-and-mortar food pantry location can have and DMARC Network Partners like IMPACT are offering delivery and online ordering alternatives.

According to a 2023 study by the Urban Institute, over 3 in 4 anti-hunger organizations doing home delivery plan to continue offering the services, and 59 percent plan to expand their home delivery.

DMARC has observed a considerable rise in need around delivery. The infrastructure that came out of necessity during the pandemic has grown to meet that rising need. As partnerships with Doordash delivery services expired in 2023, the program has adjusted its weekly schedule to better leverage available resources and volunteer support. Today close to 300 delivery orders are placed weekly with the support of volunteers and DMARC staff.

**Oct. 2018** - Two mobile food pantry units outfitted thanks to Gregory & Suzie Glazer Burt, Charlotte & Fred Hubbell, Variety - the Children's Charity of Iowa, and The Partnership for a Hunger Free Polk County.

**Apr. 2020** - Food Delivery Service starts as an alternative during the pandemic.

**Oct. 2023** - Mobile food pantries reintroduced as the DMARC-ket Food Pantry On-the-Go.

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Working Together to Meet Basic Human Needs for the greater Des Moines community.

### STAFF:

#### MATT UNGER,

Chief Executive Officer

#### LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE,

Director of Development & Outreach

#### REBECCA WHITLOW,

Food Pantry Network Director

#### DANIEL BECK

#### MERONICA BREEDLOVE

#### MICHELLE CHUMBLEY

#### MONICA CURL

#### JEFFREY CZERWIEC

#### JOE DOLACK

#### MAX DOUGLASS

#### LUKE ELZINGA

#### KELLY ERICKSON

#### CARL EVANS

#### ANDREW FIRESTINE

#### WADE JOHNSON

#### SARAH MCCRORY

#### DENNIS MINARICH

#### PATRICK MINOR

#### AMANDA PARKINS

#### REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT

#### BLAKE WILLADSEN

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#### EMILY WEBB

#### IHSAN YASEEN

#### RON BEANE (Advisory)

# THANK YOU



THE IOWA  
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## HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION

Thank you to the Iowa Clinic Healthcare Foundation for making a \$10,000 gift to help provide healthy produce options. Produce items can be cost prohibitive for many when visiting the grocery store and are one of our most expensive items to purchase. This gift gets us one step closer to reaching our goal of providing over 1,000,000 lbs of fresh produce items every year.



DOUGLAS M. WOODS  
MEMORIAL  
**HUNGER  
CHALLENGE**  
MARCH 1-31, 2024

Every single person has the opportunity to make a positive difference in their community. Doug Woods was one such person who found delight in giving and made a lasting difference in his community. DMARC will forever be inspired by and grateful for his spirit of generosity. Since the first initiative in 2013, the Doug Woods Challenge has raised over \$800k to support DMARC. We are truly grateful to the family of Douglas M. Woods who has decided to carry on his legacy.

*Take the challenge and make a gift,*  
**visit [dmarcunited.org/donate](https://dmarcunited.org/donate)**



## TURNING EDUCATION INTO ACTION

*The top fundraising team (Rachel Coon - Senior at Waukee Northwest High School, Kennedy Stanford - Junior at A.D.M. High School, Catherine Wilwerding Sophomore at Dowling Catholic High School, and Scott Nguyen - Junior at North High School) celebrates with DMARC staff Sarah Trone Garriott and Joe Dolack.*

Say hello to the next generation of community leaders. The Youth Leadership Initiative is a program of Lead DSM and a cohort of area high school students that every year are given the opportunity to grow as empowering, encouraging, and engaging young leaders.

This year's class saw the holidays were approaching and seized the opportunity to learn more about food insecurity and do something special.

The students spent the day visiting DMARC for a hunger simulation and volunteering in the afternoon at the Bidwell Pantry. Hunger simulations are an immersive and interactive experience that allows students to put themselves in the shoes of someone navigating food insecurity. The activity forces students to balance meeting their budget, health needs, and their time.

“I think the thing that was surprising to me was that someone could still be in poverty but you might still have to make much less to get benefits like SNAP,” said Kennedy Stanford a Junior at ADM High School. “Someone could still be struggling to get the resources that they need and still not get the benefits to help.”

After gaining valuable insight into the challenges others might face, the class of 2024 was put into small teams and challenged to compete in a Virtual Food Drive. Using the online fundraising tool Justgiving, they invited others to support them online to make the issue more tangible. Reaching out personally also helped them communicate what they learned.

Ultimately the students were able to fundraise over \$7,000!

“I came into the experience still having some of this internalized bias towards poverty. I think the experience made me realize how 'everyday' it can be,” said Rachel Coon, a senior at Waukee Northwest High School. “It’s not just the people who are begging for money on the street but it seeps into our everyday lives. There are probably people at my school who are facing poverty where I don’t even know about it.”

To learn more about Lead DSM and their adult and youth leadership programming, visit [www.leaddsm.org](http://www.leaddsm.org).





UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

Des Moines Area Religious Council  
100 Army Post Road  
Des Moines, Iowa 50315

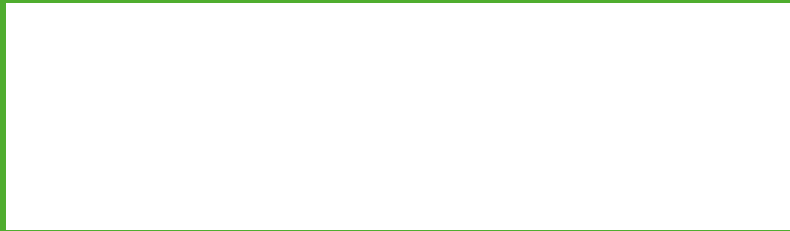
(515) 277.6969  
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THE VOICE



**THINK SPRING. THINK FRESH. THINK GREEN!**

## APRIL 11 AT CAPITAL SQUARE

Take a seat at the table in the fight against food insecurity.

Help us grow our impact this year! DMARC's signature event is a great way for your organization to make a difference. Become a sponsor, provide silent auction items, and more!



**Attend, sponsor, and Learn more at:**  
[dmarcunited.org/spring-greens](http://dmarcunited.org/spring-greens)

