

Navigating food insecurity while

ON THE CLOCK



BY BLAKE WILLADSEN
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

It's a daily occurrence. Someone walks through the office doors at DMARC seeking to connect about changes to their Medicaid plan. The confusion sets in quickly as they realize that the previous occupant of the building, The Iowa Medicaid Exchange, hasn't facilitated healthcare plans since Iowa privatized these services almost a decade ago.

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HOW OUR LIVES ARE DEFINED BEYOND FOOD

BY RACHEL COLLIER MURDOCK

A favorite quote I use in my college communication classes comes from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.” As the sixth of ten children and the member of a minority religion in my hometown as a child, I regularly experienced being stereotyped. I believe those early life experiences continue to prick my heart as I try to recognize narrow stereotypes I might subconsciously hold.

When I look beyond labels and limitations, I find people with complex, interesting lives and thorny challenges, people who may need help from time to time - people much like me, all children of the same divine creator who wants us to show love to each being, just as we are perfectly loved.

At DMARC, for example, the people who most often visit the pantries we serve defy many stereotypes. The “typical” visitor is a white, non-Hispanic woman who does not receive SNAP benefits, has one child, lives below the poverty line, and visits the food pantry only once a year (According to our most recent “Portrait of a Food Pantry Visitor” report).

It is a tragedy that, as costs of many goods have increased for all of us over the past several years, the most vulnerable in our community are absorbing the brunt of these increases. Many are working, but just can’t make ends meet. Others have difficulty navigating the complexities of government forms and offices, sometimes in a language that is not their first language.



Some are finding barriers to getting aid that were not in place a year or two ago.

So, even though the overall economy continues to be reasonably strong, our pantries gave food assistance to a record-breaking 65,000 unique individuals last year, with an alarming 1/3 of those visitors making their first-ever visit to a network pantry. Not surprisingly, Common Good Iowa’s annual cost of living report shows us that over half of single-parent workers in Iowa do not make enough income to cover a bare-bones budget.

It takes all of us using our collective creativity, care, and common sense to come up with short and long-term solutions to this issue of food insecurity and the surrounding challenges that accompany it. In this issue, you will read about how our pantry partners are providing services that go “beyond food,” and how they are collaborating with other community organizations to do so.

You’ll find local and regional programs providing English classes, rental assistance, energy assistance, career training, mentoring, personal hygiene help, and clothing closets. We believe a community hub where all of these services can be provided in a single location is the model for the future.

We look forward to continuing the wonderful work that all of you assist in every day as we work together to provide help and hope for “the least of these” in our great home state.

YOUR TIME IS WORTH MILLIONS!

After our recent Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon, we wanted to take a minute to recognize some of the individuals who donate their time to help meet the need. Thank you to everyone who continues to show up to help support our neighbors basic human needs through volunteering.

In 2023 your efforts across the DMARC Food Pantry Network included:

- The hard work of over 2,400 volunteers across 14 permanently placed food pantries, our mobile and delivery services, and numerous leadership opportunities and special events.
- Over 65,500 hours of your time were given through volunteering.
- The combined fair market value of all volunteer time in 2023 is estimated to be worth \$1,890,000+.



Rosemary Thierer - Hunger hero

Wanting to get involved as a volunteer? We need you to join us in a leadership role and put your skills of community connection to the test. Leadership committees meet monthly around a specific focus like Development and outreach, Food & Fund Drives, events, and more. **Questions?** Contact Leslie Garman, CFRE at Lgarman@dmarcunited.org.

The 'Tuesday Crew'



Invite a friend to join you for a volunteer shift this spring!

Ann McGonegle hunger hero





"...there is something behind that need for resourcing - sometimes that is unemployment, it could be an unexpected health crisis or an electric bill that hit too hard. Being in the space means I have an opportunity to talk with people who could be resourced **not just with food**, but with other information based on what need is driving their visit to the pantry."

- Lisa Juckette
Rooted Model Career Coach | Project Iowa

...continued from cover

You can see the wheels turning as they now realize a resource they relied on is now possibly at risk—just one of the urgent needs on their list for the day. Between connecting with other services, work, childcare, language barriers, you name it... it's clear the one thing that's holding them back most from navigating a tight spot is simply not having enough time.

"People navigating poverty are constantly being told 'no' or being funneled to another administrative hurdle," said Matt Unger, CEO at DMARC. "Imagine the mental toll that takes on you after awhile."

For many, the realities of navigating private charity and public assistance is unfamiliar territory.

Just in the DMARC Food Pantry Network, 1 in every 3 people receiving assistance in 2023 were new. Tight deadlines, limited hours, language or accessibility barriers, or residency requirements can make getting the help you need unattainable.

"With the numbers we are seeing across the network, it's only possible to get about 3-4 minutes with a pantry guest," Said Unger. "We're designing our spaces now with the intention of sharing them. That means inviting other providers in too. This gives guests back some of their most valuable resource – their time."

As food banks and food pantries across the country turn an eye to the future to find more ways to provide support beyond food, DMARC continues to keep collaboration weaved into the DNA of the network.

Sharing our space

While every community and every food pantry is unique, you will often find resources like clothing closets and personal care items in addition to the food available at the pantry. But DMARC pantries are often located at a hub built to navigate everyday emergencies. Things like energy assistance, English language classes, career coaching, and housing referrals can be a lifeline when a financial emergency strikes. As we design new spaces this is top of mind. The Urbandale Food Pantry is moving into a new 7200 square foot facility in 2025 and a majority of the second floor will be dedicated to providing space for other human services. When opening the DMARC-Ket Southside Food Pantry in Fall of 2023, community partners were invited in.



Lisa Juckette is a little over 2 months into her journey as the first Rooted Model Career Coach for the organization Project Iowa. While connecting with individuals who are unemployed or under-employed about career readiness, the DMARC-ket Southside Food Pantry has served as a home base once a week and has helped her reach new individuals.

“Being in the space means I have an opportunity to talk with people who could be resourced not just with food, but with other information based on what need is driving their visit to the pantry,” Said Juckette. “I think it's important to note that while we are a workforce expert, we do have connections with organizations outside of the workforce sector. Project Iowa intends to listen, learn, connect, and push for systemic change in order for people to be stable and thriving.”

Lisa is just one of several community partners that regularly connect with pantry guests at the Southside location like WIC, Evelyn D. Davis Center, & Iowa State Extension and similar work is being done at each DMARC partner pantry.

Carving a clearer path forward

While additional financial help can have minimal barriers to access, sometimes finding out if your household qualifies or getting the knowledge needed to access these programs can be a challenge. Language is also increasingly a barrier to getting connected with this help.

Stephanie Corbett directs program outreach at West Des Moines Human Services and has seen the difference that consistency can make in improving everyone's experience at their pantry and beyond. Adding signage in both English and Spanish, utilizing a language

line when translation is difficult, and offering regular English Language Learner (ELL) classes for adults has helped create space for staff and volunteers to navigate language challenges.

“We try to make sure services are always consistent. We experience a lot of language barriers so we try to keep things as simple as possible,” said Corbett. “When you come in as a guest you may know what you want but we want to actually have a conversation on what you are eligible for. We need to know things like how many times you can receive services and what's available to your family.”

While volunteers and word of mouth are often the front line for this work, the next step to ensure that people can navigate their way out of poverty faster is having more trained navigators in place. The more we can create intentional spaces to save people time, the more good we can do beyond just food.

Our volunteers run the show. I've seen volunteers practicing Spanish to communicate with visitors. There are some visitors that plan to come on a certain day to see a certain volunteer because they are just a ray of sunshine.

- **Stephanie Corbett, Program Outreach
West Des Moines Human Services**



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

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SIGNATURE EVENT RAISES OVER \$160,000

Thank you to the sponsors, donors, and volunteers who helped to make this year's Spring Greens a success. With your support, we continue to grow our impact through this signature event.

VOLUNTEER AT MEALS FROM THE MARKET



Each Saturday morning during the summer, the Meals from the Market program collects donations from vendors at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market.

DMARC is currently seeking 12 -15 volunteers to collect donations during each weekend of the Downtown Farmers' Market. Want to help? Visit dmarcunited.org/volunteer to sign up.



EVERY SATURDAY MAY THROUGH SEPT.

IOWA CUBS SUNDAY HOME GAMES

At every Iowa Cubs Sunday home game this summer, DMARC will be accepting three food items as a donation in exchange for one general admission ticket.

DMARC is looking for volunteers to assist with this effort. If you are interested, please visit dmarcunited.org/volunteer.



UPCOMING GAMES: MAY 12, MAY 26

Advocacy update: Wins from this legislative session

By Luke Elzinga, Policy and Advocacy Manager

The Iowa legislative session has drawn to a close. Unfortunately, we saw little action to address hunger and food insecurity from our state government, despite several bipartisan legislative proposals. This is especially concerning when food banks, food pantries, and other anti-hunger organizations are facing record-breaking need across the state.

Thankfully, with the help of our partners and advocates like you, we stopped harmful legislation, including efforts to create additional administrative hurdles to SNAP for eligible non-citizens and further criminalizing homelessness.

We also made progress advocating for state matching funds to support local food purchases by schools, food banks, and emergency feeding organizations. This, along with the recently announced Summer Meal Program Expansion Grant, is unfortunately nowhere near what is needed to help hundreds of thousands of Iowans access the nutritious food they need to live and thrive. Not when our state is turning down \$29 million in federal funding to help feed low-income kids through Summer EBT.

While we may not have seen the progress we would have liked to this session, we remain inspired by the constant vigilance and determination of our advocates. Thank you for your continued advocacy!



Want to get more involved?

To learn more about DMARC's advocacy efforts, and how you can get involved, contact Policy and Advocacy Manager Luke Elzinga at lelzinga@dmarcunited.org.



The number of Iowans currently enrolled in SNAP (264,330) is the lowest amount in nearly 16 years.



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

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

(515) 277.6969
dmarcunited.org

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THE VOICE

ANNUAL MEETING ALL ARE WELCOME!

THURSDAY, JUNE 20

RSVP:



Join us for an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the last year while taking a look ahead at the strategic focus of our organization. See our space and learn what ways we hope to make the biggest impact in the coming year. RSVP to attend at dmarcunited.org/annual-meeting.



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

