

WHERE FOOD PANTRIES FIT...

WHEN DISASTER HITS

BY BLAKE WILLADSEN
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

This summer's storms have served as a reminder of how fragile our lives can be in the face of a disaster. It has also shown a light on the enduring support Iowans provide to our neighbors in a time of need. But what does that support look like when the disaster you're facing isn't one that you can see?

Over the decades DMARC has served as a unifying force in helping our community weather the storm of economic crisis like the great recession of 2008 and COVID-19 Pandemic.

However, we have never been able to do this work alone – it has always taken a unified approach from faith and business communities, and local, state, and federal governments to help food pantry guests swim (not sink) in trying times.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

GET OFF THE BENCH THIS FALL

BY MATT UNGER | DMARC CEO

It's almost football season again. Both in the college and professional ranks, football can be a driving force to bring people together in support of their teams and in friendly competition with our friends who cheer for our teams' rivals. Many of you will engage in a perfect example of this with the competitive food and fund drives DMARC promotes annually around the Iowa vs. Iowa State game.

"In this community, there's rarely an empty seat in the house. We embrace, support, and help ensure our friends and neighbors can meet one of their most basic needs: food."

It's often the case that when you can get fans in the seats, you will see success on the field. If the arena is empty, a team may not do as well and might find themselves in a slump. Even when the odds are stacked against them, the cheers of thousands of fans can carry any underdog to victory. In all of you, DMARC has an AMAZING fan base.

But the game is getting tougher for our team. We assisted over 70,000 unique individuals in the fiscal year that just ended June 30th. That is more people than can fit inside Kinnick Stadium at the University of Iowa. That was also 18% more than last year when we were just shy of 60,000.

When you tally up all their visits, we supported nearly 325,000 full pantry services in the year. That is nearly as many people attended a football game last season at Iowa State University. Unfortunately, we expect the next 12 months to continue to be incredibly busy. Sustaining this level of support is difficult at best, and impossible at worst.

In football terms, we are in the fourth quarter and we are down a few touchdowns. We can still win the game, but we need our players, our coaches, AND our fans to give 100 percent to get to the goal line. We need your volunteer time, we need your contributions (and if you can do a little more, we need it!), and we need you to spread the word about our team and get us some new fans too!

We are so grateful to you, our "fans," without whom, this work would not be possible. We will play to the final whistle, both to honor your support and because a packed house of more than 70,000 are praying we will win!

FROM JULY 1, 2023 TO JUNE 30, 2024 ...

70,727

Unique individuals assisted by DMARC

Kinnick Stadium
Capacity: 69,250

324,417

total unique visits to a pantry

Jack Trice Stadium -
season total attendance: 401,411

A FAMILY VOCATION

MOTHER-SON DUO FIGHT FOOD INSECURITY ON THE GO



Join the family! Invite someone to volunteer.
Get started at dmarcunited.org/volunteer

Louise Minor turned to look at her son, trying to recall, "I think the first time you volunteered with me you were 4 or 5 years old. You made birthday cards for Meals on Wheels clients." Now, many years later the two look back on that experience as a full circle moment...

Patrick, who is the lead staff for DMARC's Mobile Food Pantry Program, spends once a week at the downtown DART Central Station alongside his mom. She has been volunteering her time alongside Patrick since 2017 and every day is different. They have seen food pantry guests go through the good and the bad; health scares, birthdays, cross-country moves, births, deaths, and everything in between. But the most meaningful days are when someone shares how much their support has meant to them.

Because of the bus stations location, many of the patrons are on their commute, live within walking distance, or are experiencing homelessness. Regardless of their situation, Patrick is thankful that he can show up and make a difference in someone's life everyday.

"I know that even if I'm exhausted or burnt out I know that everything I did, the effort went towards making someone's life easier. That's why I stay and continue to do this type of work."

Minor has worked at DMARC for 8 years and has helped launch the DMARC-Ket Southside Food Pantry, Mobile food pantry, and delivery service.



VIDEO:

"Sometimes we actually see people smiling and even laughing when they leave. That's when we've done our job. Not only did we provide the food they need, but also we've made their day brighter."

- Louise Minor, Mobile Food Pantry Volunteer

...continued from cover

The beginning

It was a simple solution to a complex problem. If we combine our resources between multiple Des Moines area pantries can we provide enough food to help meet the gap in people's food budget? What eventually became the DMARC Food Pantry Network was born in 1976 in a church basement the size of a two car garage.

Whenever our community has faced a crisis, DMARC has stayed flexible and risen to the challenge to provide food in innovative new ways. Coming out of the gas crisis of the 1980's, the red barrel program was introduced across grocery stores in the metro by local Kiwanis chapters.

The flood of 1993 forced hundreds of residents into homelessness, with no access to food. DMARC saw food resources pour in from across the nation, and the pantry distribution system passed the most rigorous test it had ever faced.

In the wake of the Great Recession the volume of services at food pantries across the network eventually skyrocketed to over 150k individuals a year after a reduction in SNAP benefits.

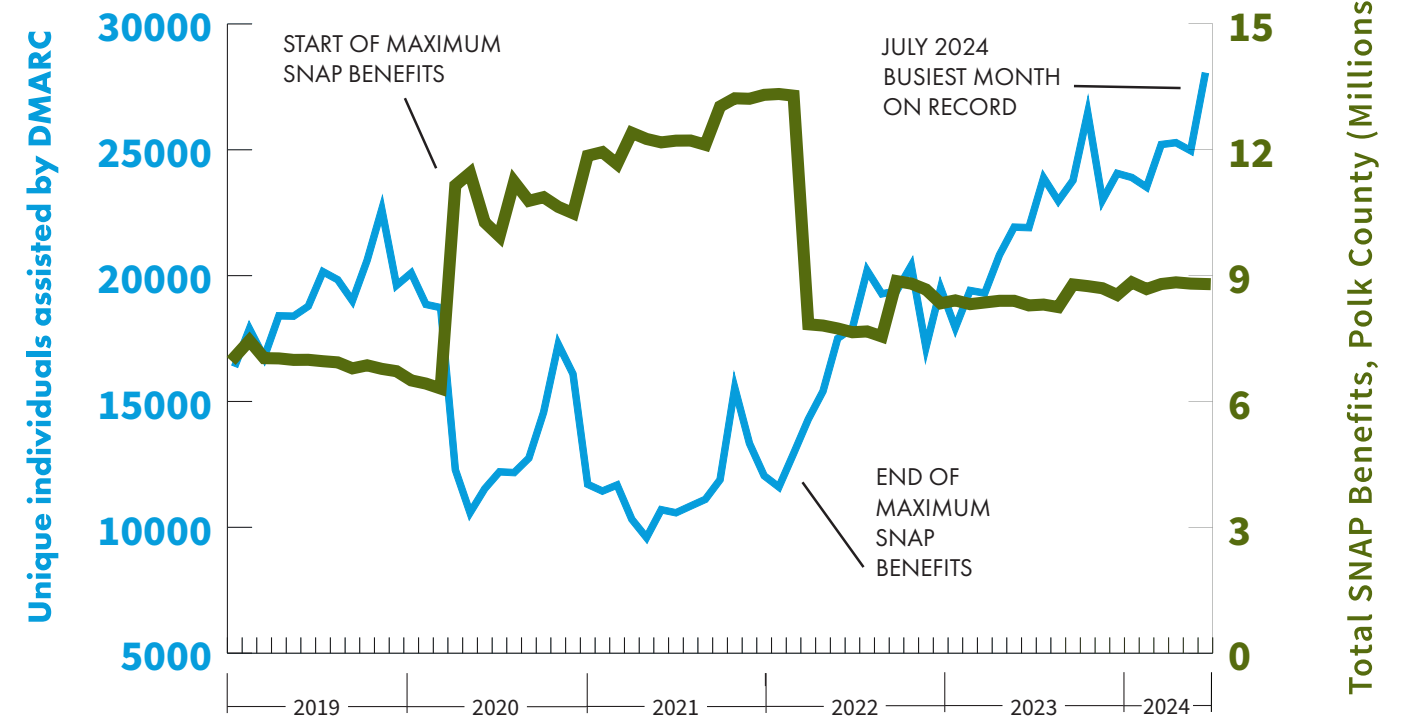
Despite all this, the elongated recovery from this crisis and its impact woke our community up to how pervasive food insecurity was.

During this time, DMARC increased its ability to move the food by better focusing on healthy food options and choice, removing pantry borders, creating a uniform intake process that made it easier to share data across the community, and expanding food storage capacity.

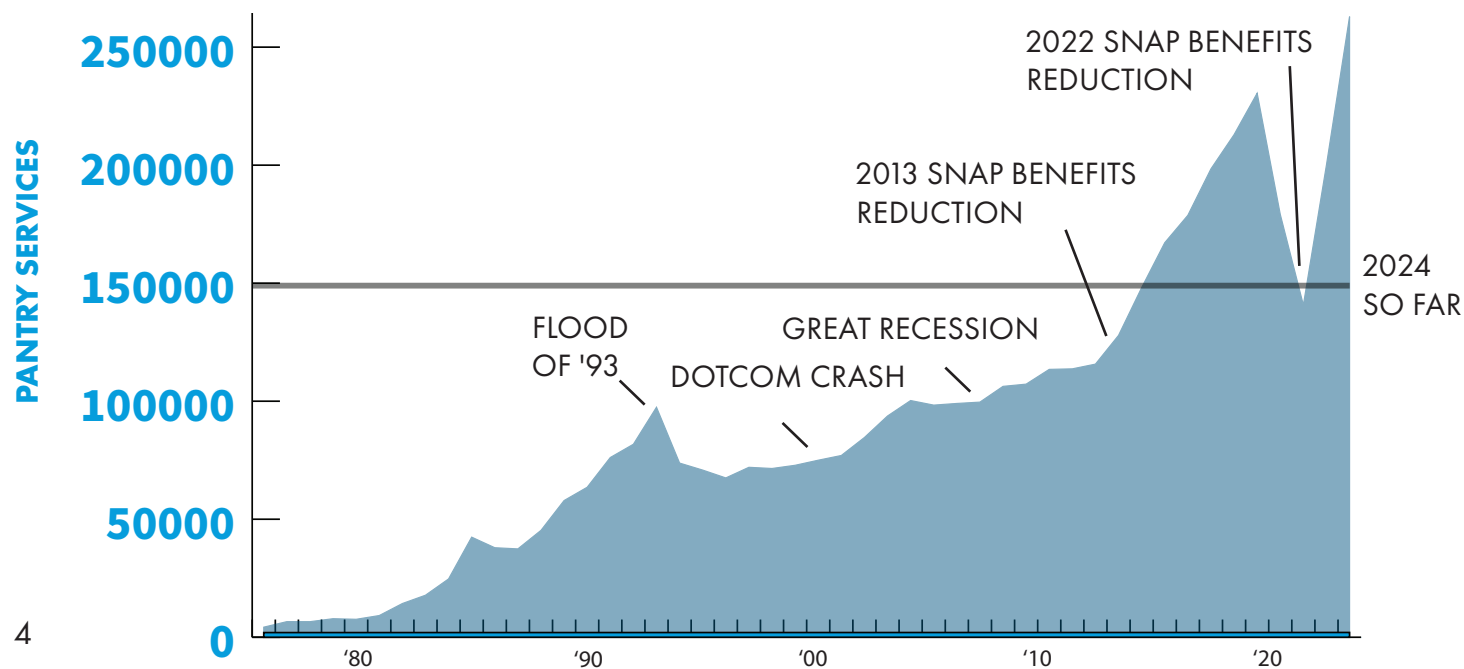
The creation of Hunger Free Polk County in 2015, a private-public partnership around food insecurity, created additional funding and awareness to help expand pantry hours and locations across the metro, open additional warehouse space for DMARC, and expand the mobile food pantry program.

These tools have proved essential in adapting our network to the needs of people today. But one of the most critical tools in addressing food insecurity, SNAP, has slowly dwindled in our state.

SNAP enrollment peaked in Iowa during the fall of 2013 and has since fallen to a nearly 16 year low. SNAP benefits don't always keep up with food spending and economic trends, and don't have the same purchasing power today as they did twenty years ago.



TOTAL FOOD PANTRY SERVICES, 1976 - PRESENT (Includes repeat visitors)



The pandemic and now

Many are surprised to hear that the pandemic was a slower time at DMARC pantries. In fact, many people were able to meet their needs simply because of the additional resources available.

Until April 2022, when many SNAP recipients in the state of Iowa saw their monthly food assistance benefits drop almost \$200 a month as pandemic allotments were cut early. Coupled with record inflation and a cost of living 'disaster', the last 12 months have brought a record 70k people to seek out assistance through the DMARC Food Pantry Network.

Today, 96% of multiperson households in the US participating in SNAP include at least one child, elderly adult, or person with a disability. Only 19% of people currently being assisted by the DMARC Food Pantry Network are unemployed adults (18-64) and nearly half of all pantry guests only utilize a DMARC pantry once or twice a year.

Common misconceptions and myths about the people who face food insecurity continue to make meeting the record need more difficult than it needs to be. This is why DMARC continues to put education and advocacy at the forefront of our work. Combatting these myths will take everyone.

The *graph above* shows the negative correlation between total SNAP benefits distributed in Polk County (green line) and the number of visitors to the DMARC Food Pantry Network (*blue line; excludes repeat visits*). The number of Iowans currently enrolled in SNAP (265,699) is nearly the lowest amount in 16 years.





PORTRAIT OF A FOOD PANTRY VISITOR

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**
- DELLEN BURK-FLORES**
- MERONICA BREEDLOVE**
- MICHELLE CHUMBLEY**
- MONICA CURL**
- JOE DOLACK**
- LUKE ELZINGA**
- KELLY ERICKSON**
- CARL EVANS**
- ANDREW FIRESTINE**
- KYLE KIRSCHBAUM**
- SARAH MCCRORY**
- DENNIS MINARICH**
- PATRICK MINOR**
- AMANDA PARKINS**
- REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT**
- BLAKE WILLADSEN**

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- MATT DURHAM**
- RANDY JENSEN**
- TARA KRAMER**
- SHEILA NELSON**
- RON BEANE** *(Advisory)*

DMARC will soon be sharing its most in-depth look at the those in our community being affected by food insecurity.

This report aims to highlight current disparities among food pantry visitors related to race and ethnicity, gender, and age and provide a tool to the public and policymakers to address these disparities. All are welcome to learn more and engage in the conversation around root causes.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION @ DMARC

SAVE THE DATE: Sept. 25 from 1-3 p.m.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are excited to announce the introduction of these community leaders onto the DMARC Board of Directors:



JACK BELL



BRIAN MCCORMAC

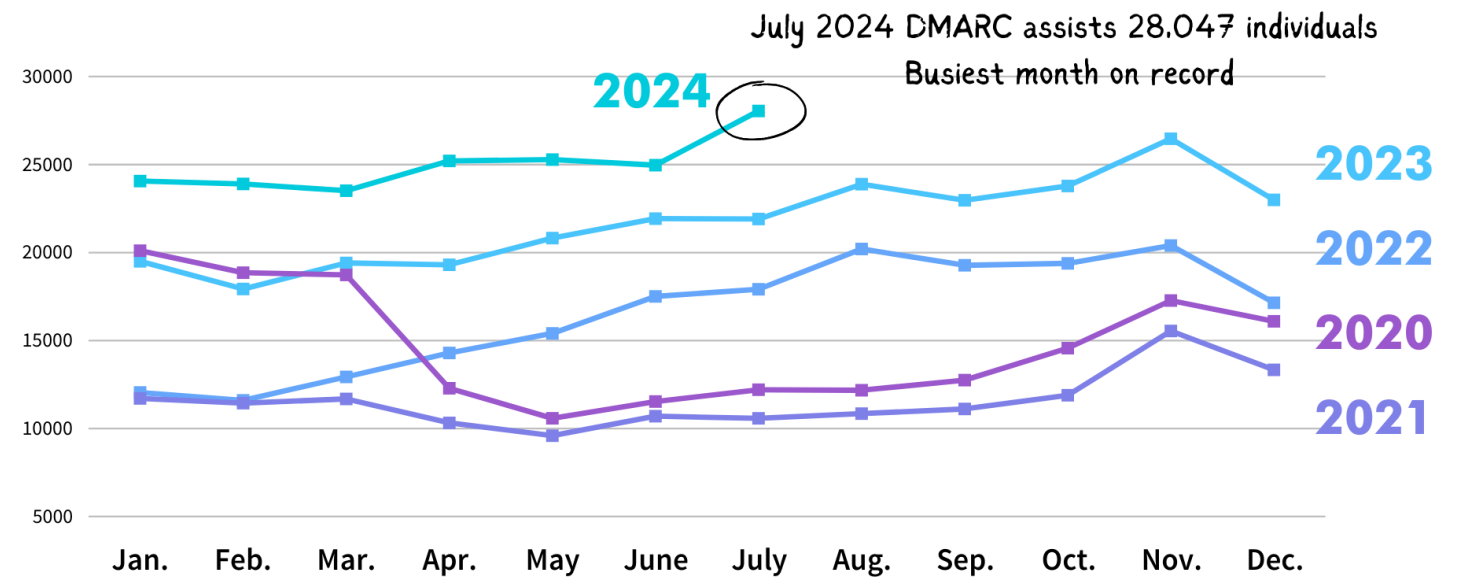


TIM QUICK



MATT ROBERTS

A BREWING STORM...



Unique individuals assisted

A year ago, the increase being seen across the DMARC Food Pantry Network was alarming as we were seeing more and more people visiting a food pantry - many for the first time. Not only is this trend continuing today, but it is growing at an unsustainable rate.

So far in 2024, each month is averaging a 20% increase in the number of unique individuals compared to the year previous. Our biggest challenge is yet to come... As the holidays bring extra expenses, November is traditionally the busiest month at food pantries.

WHAT CAN I DO?



IOWA VS. IOWA STATE FOOD AND FUND DRIVES

Who doesn't like "bragging rights" for a great cause? Whether you are a fan of the Cyclones or bleed black and gold, we can all tackle hunger together.

Did you know that Iowa's biggest rivalry back on September 7th? **Add a little competition this year by hosting a drive for DMARC!** Everyone wins when you do and your efforts will help those experiencing food insecurity. DMARC has the "playbook" you need to make your drive a success.

Create a team





UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

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

(515) 277.6969
dmarcunited.org

Des Moines Area Religious Council
 @DMARCunited

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
DES MOINES, IOWA
Permit No. 2934

THE VOICE

NEW LOOK SAME GREAT CAUSE

As the need in our community continues to grow and evolve so will the way we tell those stories. We will continue to provide the same great information about what is happening at DMARC through this newsletter, in our email communications, and in our website... just with a fresh coat of paint!

Help us as we rise to meet an unprecedented level of need in the Greater Des Moines Metro.

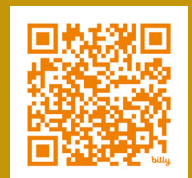
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