



The FreeStore Story



May 2017

Message from Free Store Chair Jeanie Smith

We received a handwritten letter the other day, the text of which is both awe-inspiring and heart-breaking. I couldn't help but notice the return address – the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women in Mitchellville. I do some volunteer work there and had recently taken some Free Store brochures with me. I did not recognize the name of the writer. Here is what she wrote:

“I came across your flyer today. I am a survivor of domestic abuse and I very much want to do whatever I can to help others break the cycle of domestic violence. I was once a registered nurse

with a family, career and a seemingly normal life. The abuse I had endured knew no limits and was a carefully guarded secret from the outside world. Denial and shame for what was happening prevented me from being strong enough to stand up for myself and for my children. If I can help even one person find the inner strength to do anything it takes to get out, ask for help and save yourself and your children, my time here will not be in vain. If my story, or my encouragement, friendship or prayers can help anyone, they can write me if they want to. I will do my best to help them out of that darkness. I am serving a 35-year sentence

and God walks with me daily. I know that when I am released I want to be a strong advocate for domestic violence recovery. I applaud your wonderful effort. I will keep you, your volunteers and all your recipients in my prayers daily.”

And she enclosed a check for \$10.

Ten dollars!! For someone who earns between \$0.27 and \$0.52 per hour, ten dollars is a massive gift – somewhere between 20 and 40 hours of work. We are humbled and strengthened and committed to carry on the work of the Free Store. Join us!! With your dollars, your donations, your time and your talent.



Leverage Your Donation Via Birdies for Charity

The Principal Charity Classic's Birdies for Charity is an excellent way to leverage your gift to the Free Store. Last year your donations of \$17,800 were increased by \$3,150 through this program. As a donor to the Free Store you know we are an all-volunteer organization (no paid staff). You make possible all of the home furnishings provided to families starting over after domestic violence. Your support provides the funds to cover our costs in collecting and distributing these household goods. The Birdies for Charity program is a great way to support the Free Store mission.

Here's how to easily leverage your gift: Write your check to the Free Store and send it

and the enclosed card and envelope to us. We'll send the amount of your gift (not your check) to Birdies for Charity for participation in the leverage program. For example, if you donate \$100 to the Free Store, Birdies for Charity will add 10%, so your gift becomes \$110 to help families start over. (If you'd rather not leverage your donation, mark the box on the donation card.)

Or you can go to www.thefreestore.org and click on the Sammons logo on the bottom of the page. When you get to the Contact Info page, follow the prompts.



Pickup Volunteers Get ‘a Couple Hours of Fun’

So you have a little time during the week, you enjoy a workout, and you look good in the cab of a delivery truck.

Mike Smith knows what you need to do.

“How about spending a morning with us?” he said. “It’s just a couple hours of fun!”

That would be taking a morning shift tooling around the Des Moines area picking up donated furniture for the Free Store, where Smith is the scheduler for pickup teams.

That “couple hours of fun” line is the same one used to recruit Mike nine years ago, shortly after he retired following a career as a lawyer for the state.

“I had just retired and was playing bridge at the Bridge House. Another bridge player, Harry Swanson, a/k/a the Free Store Pied Piper, put his arm around

me and said, ‘Mike, I’ve got plans for you,’” Smith said.

Swanson, a co-founder of the Free Store, explained that the charity is in constant need of drivers and helpers to fetch and deliver donated furniture to the warehouse.

Volunteers joke that “just a couple hours of fun” is a “Harryism” that translates to approximately four hours of volunteer work.

“Since I have trouble saying no, I said I would do it,” said Smith, now 73.

But it’s more than that. “It’s about giving back. I’m in good health, I was fortunate enough to get a good education, I had a job I enjoyed and it provided a good pension. So I do feel very fortunate and I’m happy to help others who need a hand.”

Drivers need to be in reasona-

bly good shape but they won’t be expected to carry excessive loads.

“We don’t take hide-a-beds and other heavy stuff. Remember, we generally need beds and small things for small apartments. “

As the sign on the trucks declare, the Free Store needs “gently used” furniture. “We don’t take junk.”

Morning shifts are scheduled every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Most volunteers work from one to three mornings per month. To volunteer or for more information, leave a message for Mike at the Free Store, 282-3733, or contact Mike directly by voice or text at 515-991-3193.

For a more fulsome description of this and other volunteer positions, see our website, www.thefreestore.org

Time to Fill the Mayflower



Once again it’s time to fill a big Mayflower moving van with gently used furniture and household items for the Free Store. The truck will be easy to spot at Valley West Mall on May 13 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

We especially need twin and bunk beds and small furniture.

Please, no large furniture.

We also need smaller items that make a home, things like vacuum cleaners, coffeemakers, toasters, crock pots, pots and pans, bedding, and linens.

Once again, thanks so much to the Mayflower people, to Valley West Mall, and to Children and Families of Iowa.



Free Store 2016 by the numbers

Total families served 262

DV clients 121

Needy 95

Youth 39

Refugee 1

Veteran 1

Makeup of Families Served

-- 56 % single with children

-- 32 % childless singles

-- 6 % families with children

-- 6 % childless families

Paid Staff 0

Volunteers’ Energy Limitless