



The FreeStore Story



November 2013

Our Treasures: Volunteers and Supporters

By Jeanie Smith

The FreeStore is dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence. As we all know, these victims are primarily women and, of these female victims of domestic violence, 38% have children under age 12 living with them.

What the FreeStore does for these victims is important. We can't help them escape their violent living situations, but we can help them create safe new environments when they make the break with their abusers. And hopefully this begins to break the cycle for their children.

And how do we do it? We do it because of two very important groups: selfless volunteers and generous supporters. When the FreeStore started, there were three volunteers who did it all: they picked up furniture in their own trucks and vans, they worked in the warehouse (then a single garage storage unit), and they met the women leaving the CFI shelter who needed furniture. Often they used their own vehicles to move the furniture.

As our donations increased, so did our ability to help families and so did our volunteer numbers. At last count there were almost 100 people who regularly or occasionally give time and effort to the FreeStore – and that doesn't include the groups who come in once or twice a year from churches and business to help with special projects—and we still have NO paid staff.

We now have

- several volunteers who manage administrative tasks (records, financials, grants, etc.)
- several more who greet referrals from domestic violence organizations and help them choose the furniture to fill their needs
- a group who tends to the needs of DV victims from shelters outside the DSM metro area
- several teams who move furniture to the DV victims' homes
- a person who schedules these DV greeters and movers
- several people who greet

referrals of non-DV families and help them pick out their furniture

- a person who schedules the greeter and non-DV families for FreeStore visits
- several teams who go out and pick up donations
- a person who schedules the pickup teams
- several people who work to keep the warehouse organized
- a person who oversees the warehouse inventory
- a group who takes the phone calls and schedules the donation pickups
- a person who schedules the telephone schedulers

And we can do this, day after day and week after week, because of the generosity of you, our supporters. That's where you come in! We simply could not do what we do without your generosity that allows us to pay the rent on the warehouses, modestly heat the buildings, and maintain and fuel our trucks. You are the lifeblood of the FreeStore. We are grateful for all you do for us.

FreeStore Update

By Terry Swanson

Well, in May I reported that the FreeStore was having a bit of a slow start compared to 2012. I don't know whether it is a good thing or a bad one but that level of activity didn't last. We've more than caught up and by the end of Oct. we'd served 205 families—including 220 adults and 283 children.

This means that 503 people have beds to sleep on and tables to eat on because of your generosity. In fact, in the past 10 months we gave away 283 mattress sets and 481 tables and chairs.

Each of these families took over 3/4 of a ton of furniture valued at \$1750. Actually the value in dollars was 1,750 but the value to these families was priceless.

Priceless, not only because of the creature comfort the items provided but also because of the emotional support they afforded, the humanity they supported, and the happiness they were responsible for. It takes a lot of work, many volunteers, and much support to make this happen, year after year.

It's worth it, though, when we see the happy smiles on the faces of the folks we serve.

It's even more worth it when we see the tears. Judy, one of our volunteers, meets women who are leaving the CFI Domestic Abuse Shelter. A week or so ago, she was helping three women staggered over two hours. The three saw each other for the first time in several weeks so there was lots of hugging and smiling going on—at first.

Then Judy noticed two of the three women were crying pretty hard—one was almost hysterical. When she finally calmed them down, one of the women said, "I told Mary (not her real name) I had spent the last week sleeping in my car. And then, she told me she spent the last week sleeping in her van. And then we both started crying."

Judy said, "Hugs all around now because that's over and tonight you sleep in your own beds in your own homes." She had tears in her voice when she told the story and I had tears in my eyes while I listened.

The thanks they expressed goes to two groups: our supporters and our volunteers. Between you, you make stories like this happen; you give people dignity and hope. Be proud! Be very Proud!

The FreeStore is especially grateful this Thanksgiving to two organizations and a local business man who have been especially generous to us this year: the S. I. Gimbel Foundation that granted us \$12,520; United Way of Central Iowa that included us in their Day of Caring project that built 300 new dressers for kids; and Mr. and Mrs. Mike Coppola who gave us a generous donation. We are proud to partner with them and value their support.

Some days I daydream about how nice it would be if our mission would dry up and blow away for lack of clients. Then I wake up to the reality that it won't happen for some time yet. Until the time it does, our volunteers with the help of all you great supporters, will continue to work at what we do best: collecting and storing furniture and **GIVING IT AWAY!**

FreeStore Annual Open House

Greeters

Join us as we

Warehouse Workers

"Celebrate Our FreeStore Volunteers"

Pickup Crews

Fri. Nov. 22

4PM—7PM

Movers

Schedulers

FreeStore Warehouse 11th St. Entrance