

The FreeStore Story

Spring 2020



A FreeStore Note

By Marty Rathje, Board Chair

I've got three points for you in this message: our forced slowdown for now, our determination to gear up quickly when it's safe to do so, and our reliability in a time of uncertainty. Normally this would be the time to recount our work in the previous calendar year, and there is a lot to tell. Our all-volunteer charity had its busiest year ever in 2019, helping 336 families get a fresh start, a 16 percent increase over 2018. But current events have overtaken normalcy this spring, so I'll send you to our website for more info on our previous year, www.theFreeStore.org/AnnualReport2019.pdf

Due to the pandemic, we have suspended all warehouse activity and pickup and delivery operations. We'll eventually need those donations of gently-used household goods, so hang on to them until it's safe for us to collect them. We don't know when we will resume operations, but it won't be until we can keep volunteers,

clients and donors safe. Once we do resume, we expect there will be catchup demand. That's because it's likely that the pandemic — and the social isolation necessary to combat it — will put vulnerable people at risk for abuse. Research has determined a direct link between natural disasters and increased rates of abuse, especially in households experiencing significant financial strain.

Part of this newsletter is a financial appeal. The FreeStore has a proven track record of helping families start over, and we do it with almost no overhead. Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll see testimonials from local experts who know our work. I hope you'll read their opinions. Also elsewhere you'll see a form that asks for your donations. We still need to pay rent, insurance and other fixed overhead expenses so we do continue to ask for your financial help.

Finally, in these uncertain times, please be safe: physically, mentally and fiscally. Practice social distancing and find ways to exercise body and mind. Thank you for your support of the FreeStore.

**Visit www.theFreeStore.org/AnnualReport2019.pdf
to view our annual report.**



Three Stories, One FreeStore



Iowa Homeless Youth Centers

"I've done 40-plus moves with you in the last couple of years," said Kevin Ludwig, the rapid-rehousing youth advocate for the Iowa Homeless Youth Center. By "moves," he's referring to clients who set up apartments using furniture and housewares they have selected at the FreeStore warehouse. "It's really convenient to have one-stop shopping for these youth." He explained that in other communities, advocates like him need to rely on individual calls for donations. He said the FreeStore program allows advocates to focus on other needs of clients. "I work with 18- to 24-year-olds who are coming from emergency shelters and who are just at the beginning stages of learning to be adults," he said.

After the client is placed in a new living situation, "we do case management for a year, so I see all that furniture all the time."

Children and Families of Iowa



"We absolutely love the FreeStore, I mean it. It's a miracle for our clients. I could go on and on about it," said Lori Jensen, the community resource coordinator for Children and Families of Iowa. "We're dealing with people who leave bad situations with literally just the clothes on their backs. We can meet their basic needs like food, shelter, diapers for the babies and so forth, but when they are ready to set up a home of their own, they don't have anything." She said the FreeStore allows clients to tour the warehouse and select gently-used donated furniture and housewares. FreeStore volunteers then deliver the goods to the client's apartment. Jensen said she appreciates the FreeStore's understanding of domestic violence clients. "When women leave abusive relationships, they often don't leave just once. For whatever reason, they frequently go back to the abuser, and when that ends badly, they once again have little or nothing to build a home. So we greatly appreciate that the FreeStore will help some of our clients more than once," she said.



Chrysalis Foundation

Chrysalis, the foundation for women and girls in the Des Moines area, has been a stalwart supporter of the FreeStore for years, yearly awarding its maximum operating-funds grant (\$7,500) to the FreeStore. "We're impressed with the FreeStore and its mission. They provide services with very little padding and no paid staff. That's extremely unusual," said Chrysalis Executive Director Terry Hernandez. In addition to grants, Chrysalis has offered its staff as planning facilitators as the FreeStore focuses its mission and plans for the future. Hernandez said it works both ways. "We are very local-oriented and we like to know what's happening on the ground. We can always go to one of your board members for insight," she said.