

The FreeStore Story

November 2019



A FreeStore Note

By Marty Rathje, Board Chair

We've had a nice problem this year — what to do with an unusual outpouring of donations. Our request has been the same all these years — think of us first, please, when you need a home for gently-used furniture and household items. We in turn have used your donations to give hundreds of families a fresh start.

The request didn't change, but wow, the donations sure did. We had such an abundance of donations this spring and summer that we have been able to serve groups beyond what we've done in the past. This year a number of hotels renovated their spaces and gave us lots of furniture, mattresses and bedding. We got dozens of dressers and dining chairs from an individual who bought them at an Iowa State University auction. Simpson College donated twin-sized mattresses

to us. And we received vanload after vanload of donations from individuals who were cleaning house or downsizing this year.

All of this largess put a strain on our warehouse and pick-up volunteers, but it also allowed us to expand service without interrupting our distribution of furniture and household goods to our normal, and growing, client flow.

For example, we sent mattresses and other furniture to programs for the homeless. We provided sofas, chairs and TV's to the domestic violence shelter. We furnished two houses for a new transitional housing effort in Des Moines. And we're in the process of helping to furnish a new home for victims of sex trafficking in Des Moines.

So in a season of thankfulness, I'd like to say — again — that we are so thankful for our donors and volunteers who put in extra time and effort to meet these new needs. And thanks to the organizations that had confidence in us to help them.

Dressers for Kids

We have a new dressers-for-kids program. These dressers are one of our most popular items — nearly every client wants one per child — but they're always in short supply. In years past United Way (many thanks) sponsored a big build-a-dresser day that netted about 250 dressers built from kits. But that charity was unable to continue the program this year so we're asking you to help make up the difference.

Our idea is for families to buy a kit or two — they're \$60 each — and put them together. The directions are clear and easy for these IKEA kits and it takes maybe an hour or so. It's a great way to spend time with the grandkids. We're aiming for 250 dressers and we're a little more than halfway there.

FreeStore volunteer Abby Conley says these dressers make a difference. "The first time I did a delivery for a domestic violence client and her 3-year-old daughter, it was heartbreaking to see that the girl's only possession was a tiny suitcase in the corner of her room. When we delivered a bed and a brand new dresser to her room, the smile on this little girl's face was priceless," she said.

If you would like a dresser kit, contact Abby at (515) 865-8759 or Conley.abby@gmail.com



Larry Anderson — The Numbers Guy

FreeStore Treasurer Larry Anderson keeps track of the money, but he does a lot more than that.

"Larry does so much for us behind the scenes," said Board Chair Marty Rathje. "He writes all the checks, does our budgeting, keeps track of financial filing requirements for non-profits, and he's the guy who manages the warehouse relationships. We rent both of our warehouses, and Larry is our primary interface with those landlords. If there's a water leak, Larry is the guy who goes to the landlord."

"His demeanor and his passion for the FreeStore is what makes him so effective," Rathje said.

Larry got involved after attending an early organizational meeting at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church about 14 years ago, not long after he had retired after a 27-year-career as General Manager of the West Des Moines Water Works.

"I felt pretty lucky in life and I was looking for a way to give back," he said. "I liked the premise of the FreeStore — helping people who need to start over because of crummy things happening in their lives. I didn't want to be chair or vice chair, so treasurer seemed like a good thing for me. I jokingly tell people that I got to be treasurer because I was the last one to raise my hand," he said.

The FreeStore has a budget of about \$100,000 a year. Most of the expenses are warehouse rent,

truck maintenance, and purchase of microwaves, vacuum cleaners and other household necessities for clients. The organization is entirely volunteer-run; there is no paid staff.

In addition to keeping the books, Larry is an ambassador for the

FreeStore, often traveling to distant towns to give presentations. He repeats the advice that a Twin-Cities organizer told him years ago: "You think you're dealing in furniture. You're not. You're dealing in self-esteem," he said.

He has seen clients change demeanor almost instantly when they come to the warehouse to pick out their furniture. "When they come in, a lot of them are downtrodden, not happy. There are smiles on their faces when they leave. There are lots of hugs and thank-you's. It's a very rewarding experience," he said.

There are a couple of kudos that Larry would like to hand out. One is to LWBJ of West Des Moines, a business consultant firm that prepares our federal forms without charge. Another goes to the two warehouse owners who appreciate the FreeStore's mission and charge below-market rent for their buildings.



Larry Anderson,
FreeStore Treasurer

If you would like to receive the biannual FreeStore newsletter electronically, please send your request and your email address to info@thefreestore.org. We'll use the savings in postage and printing to help families start over.



FreeStore by the Numbers

Year	Families	Adults	Children	DV Clients
2018	210	232	311	61
2019	221	251	343	90

2019 has felt like a busy year and the numbers bear that out! In particular we have seen an increase of almost 50% over 2018 activity in domestic violence clients served. The FreeStore provides delivery service to these clients so that is a big jump in our truck usage and in the number of greeters and delivery volunteers needed. Help us meet this increased demand for our services by donating or joining us as a volunteer.

Email us at info@thefreestore.org to help families start over!