

The FreeStore Story

Fall 2020



A FreeStore Note

By Marty Rathje, Board Chair

We're back in business but it's nothing like business as usual. Just like everybody else with a Covid story, our all-volunteer charity is following strict safety guidelines as we collect gently used household items and use them to help families start over. We've also made important expansions to our service and we took a big money-saving step that proves—again—that we're careful with your contributions. And we have a new truck, thanks to generous donations. More on that elsewhere in the newsletter.

You may recall we suspended activities last spring because of the pandemic. Within several weeks, we started up again—slowly. Safety is critical. Masks are required, social distancing is the new normal, delivery drivers are not permitted inside client homes, and donations for pick up must be made outside of homes or in garages.

We need more volunteers. The main jobs are truck driver, truck loader, greeter, scheduler, and warehouse worker. See our website www.thefreestore.org for descriptions. We'd love to have you. And as we say, smiles are guaranteed. Leave a message at 282-3733 or email us at info@thefreestore.org.

Because of Covid, the number of clients served so far in 2020 is behind our normal pace, but client activity

is starting to rebound. We have helped 187 families through October compared to 263 in 2019. Agencies that serve and refer clients to us are themselves hobbled by the pandemic. Also, it's increasingly difficult for agencies to find affordable apartments for the clients we serve.

But in other areas, we're expanding our service. Last August, when the derecho crushed Cedar Rapids, the Central Furniture Rescue charity in that city needed help. A group of FreeStore volunteers delivered two truckloads of furniture to them. We're also helping other non-profits in the Des Moines area as we are able. Another important service change: We are now providing trucks and drivers to deliver furniture and household items for all of our clients, not just our DV clients. More on that elsewhere in the newsletter.

Finally, we have a new secondary warehouse. The new space is much cleaner, it's climate controlled, it has an indoor dock and it costs about half of our previous space. All of which is to say we use your donations carefully, so please keep them coming. Information on how to do that by mail is located elsewhere in the newsletter. New this year is the ability to give online via our revised website thefreestore.org.

You receive this newsletter because you have supported us in some way in the past. For that we are thankful. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us at 282-3733 or email us at info@thefreestore.org.

Fall 2020 FreeStore Gift

Yes! I want to help the FreeStore continue its work.

Name _____

Address _____

Email Address _____

My Gift: \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$200 Other \$ _____

Information on the other side explains how your tax-deductible gift can be anonymously leveraged up to 10 per cent by the Birdies for Charity program.

Please return this portion in the envelope provided.

Your donations help pay for expenses such as warehouse rent, truck maintenance and fuel, furniture re-building supplies, and cleaning supplies for clients.

Some positive feedback

A simple thank you goes a long way at the FreeStore. Here's a note from a recent client: "Thank you for making my visit to the FreeStore so welcoming and personal. My house looks like a home now." Our financial donors also give us energy with their encouragement. Here's an example this fall: "I am a big fan of the work you do, especially helping victims of domestic abuse. Your great volunteers make it possible for gifts like this one go to help those in need rather than a lot of administrative overhead. Keep up the good work."



Volunteers Cheryl Christie and Ellen MacRoy check out a table of donated dishes to sort

Delivery Service to Clients Expanded

The FreeStore board has decided to offer our trucks and drivers for all of our clients, not just survivors of domestic abuse. The new policy will be evaluated after six months, with Board Chair Marty Rathje saying the all-volunteer charity could use a few more drivers and helpers.

"There have been a number of cases in which clients canceled because they could not arrange their own trucks. Others showed up in vehicles that were too small. We're here to help people start over, so we're trying to remove a barrier to that goal," Rathje said.

FreeStore volunteers will continue to load trucks from our warehouse but clients and their social service advocates will be responsible for carrying furniture to their new homes. As a precaution to protect against Covid-19, FreeStore drivers and helpers are not allowed into client homes.

Rathje explained that the FreeStore operates box trucks that are easy to maneuver. No special license is required and driver training will be offered. Interested people should call 282-3733.

"We're also interested in finding more volunteers to sort donations, help in the warehouse, schedule pickups, and other jobs," Rathje said. "We like to say that in all of these jobs, smiles are guaranteed."

We have a new truck!

New to us, anyway. It's a 2019 Ford E-350 with only 37,000 miles. "It's the best truck we've ever acquired," says Mike Smith, who along with Craig Miller and Bill Brentano scoured the market and found this gently-used fleet truck for only \$30,000. For more than a decade our all-volunteer organization has depended on two elderly trucks (an '04 and an '06) to make deliveries and to collect furniture and household donations. "With those trucks needing more and more maintenance, and with our expanded operations, we definitely needed new wheels," Smith said. The 15-foot box is the same as the older trucks but the truck is six inches taller, making it easier to load mattresses and other large furniture. The purchase would not have been possible without generous donations from the Business Women's Association of Des Moines and Dick and Donna Bray.



Our new truck, along with truck wranglers Mike Smith and Bill Brentano



Birdies for Charity

Many charities in central Iowa, including the FreeStore, partner with the Principal Charity Classic Golf Tournament's Birdies for Charity program. The FreeStore receives EVERY penny you donate. The Birdies program adds up to 10 per cent to your gift (at no cost to you). For example, your \$100 becomes as much as \$110 to help families start over. Write your check to the FreeStore and mail it in the envelope provided. We process the check and tell Birdies only the amount, not anything about the donor. Learn more at: principalcharityclassic.com/charity/birdies-for-charity

Please check here if you prefer to not take part in Birdies for Charity.