PROVIDING FOOD IN A PANDEMIC

BY LUKE ELZINGA, COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

Before opening the door to welcome the first visitor of the day, DMARC Mobile Food Pantry Associate Patrick Minor (pictured right) sanitized their hands and put on a pair of gloves, goggles, and a mask.

This routine, unfamiliar at first, is now just another regular aspect of providing food to hundreds of people every week through DMARC’s mobile food pantry locations.

“As this pandemic began to unfold,” said DMARC CEO Matt Unger, “we asked ourselves how we could best balance providing food to those in need while taking care not to contribute to spreading the virus in our community.”

DMARC has been committed to maintaining food distribution during the pandemic, but has been taking steps to promote the safety of staff, volunteers, and people visiting food pantries.

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I don’t think anyone was expecting 2020 to be the year of the global pandemic. This year has already brought far too many surprises, but it’s good to know we can rely on one steadfast constant: the giving spirit of Iowa and Greater Des Moines.

The outpouring of support we have received from the community has been nothing short of awe-inspiring. So many of you have stepped up to help, whether it be through a monetary donation, volunteering time at a mobile food pantry or delivering food, or hosting a virtual drive to rally your community to support DMARC. We truly cannot thank you enough.

As I’m sure you will read on page 4, we have seen some slower weeks at DMARC food pantries, but are anticipating that once some temporary additional resources are no longer available, we will see more people turn to the DMARC Food Pantry Network for assistance than ever before.

We are taking steps to make sure we maintain an adequate food supply and are placing food orders now to prepare for what the summer months may bring. Like countless other businesses and organizations, our food supply chain is dealing with a tremendous amount of stress. While we have met the challenge of continuing to get food into our warehouse and out to our partner food pantries, we have seen a marked increase in the prices we are paying for that food.

Despite the challenges our community and nation are facing, we have witnessed incredible acts of service and philanthropy during this time, acts which inspire us and provide hope and optimism for our community’s shared future together.

DMARC is moving ahead in finding a new home as we have already outgrown our current facility at 1435 Mulberry Street we moved into at the start of 2014. Later this year, we will launch a capital campaign fundraiser for the new facility. We don’t want to say too much right now, but are excited at the possibilities and opportunities a new space will bring the organization.

Looking ahead, none of us knows exactly what the future may hold. But we are preparing to see more people turn to our food pantries due to the extended economic impact from the pandemic for months, if not years, to come.

And we know that we can rely on the support of our community in times of need, because you have proven it over and over again.

The investments that you are making in our organization are preparing us to meet the needs of our community today and into the future.

Matthew Durham
President
DMARC has received an incredible outpouring of support from the greater Des Moines community, with donations coming in from over 900 different individuals, groups, congregations, businesses and foundations in the past two months.

We heard from a number of individuals who donated their Economic Impact Payment (stimulus check) in part or in whole to DMARC.

While we cannot personally thank everyone who has given here (the list would take up our entire issue—and then some), we wanted to share a few words of gratitude we heard from one of our donors.

Both Ann and I grew up in Iowa and have lots of family throughout the state. During this tough time we wanted to give back to a cause that would have direct impact to our community. I had learned about DMARC through high school, as we had our own food drives to support DMARC. We have also participated in food drives through our church. DMARC has given us a great opportunity to help our local community deal with these times. —Josh Otten, Waukee

We have also seen individuals, congregations, businesses, and other groups host virtual food drives for DMARC. Donating funds is an especially helpful way to give at this time, as we are facing rising food costs and cannot process in-kind food donations from traditional food drives in the manner that we usually do with volunteer groups.

**Thank you to the following for hosting virtual food drives!**

Ankeny Centennial High School  
Capitol Hill Christian Church  
Capitol Region Republican Women  
Central Presbyterian Church  
Curry Friends and Family  
Des Moines Kiwanis Club  
DMARC Board of Directors  
Drake University  
Farmers Mutual Hail Insurance of Iowa  
Feed Our Community – Virtual Hugs to Neighbors in Need  
Homesteaders Life Insurance  
Jennifer’s Cozy Yoga  
Johnston High School  
Junior League of Des Moines  
Life 107.1  
Marsh and McLennan Companies  
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America  
Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Catholic Church  
Saint Pius X Catholic Church  
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church  
SCIFL AFL-CIO  
Shazam  
Umble Family and Friends  
Unity Center of Des Moines

Visit dmarcunited.org/donate/virtual-drive/ to host your own today!

**DONOR HONOR ROLL**

Thank you for the following donors for providing leadership giving support to DMARC in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Bruce and Susan Kelley  
- C. Dean and Sandra Carlson  
- Christ Community Church  
- Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines  
- Delta Dental Foundation  
- Ernest & Florence Sargent Family Foundation  
- Global Atlantic Financial Group  
- Gupta Family Foundation  
- Jay and Julie Jacobi  
- Kyle and Sharon Krause Family Foundation  
- MH Equipment  
- Michael and Diane Heid  
- MidAmerican Energy Foundation  
- Mid-Iowa Health Foundation  
- Principal Charity Classic - Birdies for Charity  
- Sarabeth and William Anderson  
- St. Mark Lutheran Church  
- The Ralph & Sylvia G. Green Charitable Foundation  
- Wendy Henry
Partner pantries have stayed flexible to adapt to public health guidelines and implement alternative food pantry distribution methods. Rather than giving visitors the opportunity to physically walk through the food pantry and select the items they would like, pantries have shifted to providing limited choice and pre-packed bags of food to limit contact and mass gathering.

Other practices being implemented by food pantries include call-ahead ordering, curbside pick-up, pick-up by proxy, and deliveries.

DMARC also launched a food pantry delivery service to provide food to those who cannot visit a pantry due to health concerns, transportation issues, or other mitigating circumstances.

Delivery requests are placed via telephone and the food is dropped off the next day. In addition to help from volunteers, DART and Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa have both provided drivers to assist with no-contact food pantry deliveries.

DMARC has also altered other aspects of its operations, including remote working options for staff, suspending the Red Barrel program, and cancelling large volunteer groups and gatherings.

As April approached, food pantries braced for another surge in use. But it never arrived. In April, the DMARC Food Pantry Network assisted just two-thirds the amount of people than in a typical month. Nearly 4,000 people who used a DMARC food pantry in each January, February, and March, did not do so in April. Lower food pantry use continued into May.

And while food pantry traffic dropped or remained the same at permanent food pantries, DMARC did see a marked increase in the number of people assisted at mobile food pantry locations.

DMARC notes a number of factors contributing to the slow down at food pantries, including people staying at home, additional food resources available in the community, increases to Food Assistance (SNAP) benefits, and people receiving their Economic Impact Payments.

“We have seen a lot of great food relief efforts by private companies, faith communities, nonprofit organizations and others spring up,” said Unger. “And I think we have also seen evidence of the impact made by removing barriers to the Food Assistance program and increasing benefit amounts for many Iowans.”
In April and May, all recipients of Food Assistance (SNAP) were issued the maximum benefit amount, increasing benefits for many participants. How long these temporary increases will continue is uncertain.

“We have also heard from some regular food pantry users that they are forgoing using the pantry or taking less food because they do not want anyone else to go without,” said Unger. “We appreciate the sentiment but want everyone to know that DMARC’s food supply is sound and if you need food, we are here to help.”

DMARC has been successful in maintaining its supply of food during the pandemic, but much of the food it purchases has increased in cost due to high demand.

NEW FACES AT FOOD PANTRIES

In March and April, DMARC saw 2,614 individuals use a DMARC food pantry for the first time ever.

When compared to everyone who has visited a DMARC food pantry so far in 2020, these 2,614 new individuals were:

- twice as likely to be unemployed
- one-third as likely to receive Food Assistance
- twice as likely to identify as Hispanic/Latinx

These new pantry visitors were also more likely to use a mobile food pantry, more likely to identify as male, and tend to have a smaller average household size.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT

Thank you to all the individuals, congregations, businesses, organizations, and groups who have stepped up to support DMARC during this time.

“It’s important to remember that we were seeing double-digit increases in food pantry use before the pandemic began,” said Unger. “We remain ready to meet the need, and anticipate that once some of these additional resources are no longer available, we will see large increases in use throughout the DMARC Food Pantry Network for the extended future. DMARC will continue to rely on our generous community to meet that need.”

Your investment ensures DMARC’s ability to meet the needs of Greater Des Moines, now and into the uncertain future.
JOIN DMARC’S JUST ONE SOCIETY

These are difficult times for everyone. In order to keep fulfilling our mission of meeting basic human needs in our community, we need your help today—and tomorrow. One way to do that is through legacy or planned giving through DMARC.

The Just One Society is DMARC’s legacy society. It is comprised of individuals—both living and past—who believe so much in our mission that they have made a financial commitment to our organization which will help us not just today—but tomorrow. Only through planning is this possible.

With the pandemic, many are evaluating their estates. One of the simplest way to make a legacy gift is through your will. You can leave all or a percentage of your estate to DMARC, ensuring that DMARC is here for those in need far into the future. You can also give a gift through your life insurance policy or a gift of property.

Whichever way you elect to give, DMARC will ensure that your legacy continues through our mission. Learn more today by visiting dmarcunited.org/planned-giving/.

CARES ACT IMPACT ON CHARITABLE GIVING

As many of our donors give through an IRA by making their required minimum distribution, it is important to know that the new CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act temporarily suspends the requirements for required minimum distributions (RMD) for the 2020 tax year.

The new law also expands charitable giving incentives and allows taxpayers who take the standard deduction to make up to $300 of charitable cash contributions to qualified charities this year.

For those who do itemize their deductions, the new law allows for cash contributions to qualified charities such as ours to be deducted up to 100% of your adjusted gross income for the 2020 calendar year.
Because we haven’t been able to gather in the usual ways, we are finding opportunities to do interfaith engagement online!

Over the past several years, DMARC has worked with community partners to create opportunities for our neighbors to build relationship across the religious spectrum.

Due to COVID-19, we have had to cancel some of our planned interfaith events, including the monthly “Meet My Religious Neighbor” open house series in collaboration with the Comparison Project at Drake University, CultureAll, and Interfaith Alliance of Iowa. Unfortunately, the celebration of Holi at the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of Iowa on March 8 would be the last in-person event for the season. Due to the pandemic, the New Year’s celebration with the Laotian Buddhist community in April and an Iftar meal with the Bosnian Muslim community in May were canceled.

But despite the new limitations, we did not give up on finding ways to connect with our neighbors. Like so many other institutions, we scrambled to come up with alternative programming that would work in our new circumstances. So far, we’ve been pretty excited about the results!

Our first effort was the “Meet Your Neighbor” series. Each Wednesday at 3pm, our friends at CultureAll brought in their network of Ambassadors to share some aspect of their culture. Over the series we have learned how to spice up our ramen noodles with Gurwinder Kapur, learned about Klezmer music while Abe Goldstien played tunes on his accordion, and stretched with Shweta Agrahari as she led us through yoga poses we could do from our chairs.

Another project that came out of this time was the “Faithfully Community” panel series. The first panel brought together leaders from different religious communities to share about the challenges and opportunities they are experiencing in this time. Ihsan Yaseen from the Muslim community joined Pr. Fred Gaddy from St. Paul AME Church and Som Acharya from the Nepali Hindu community for this first panel.

One of our favorite things about panels is the opportunity to introduce the panelists to one another. Even though these panelists come from very different religious and cultural backgrounds, there were so many points of connection in the conversation.

Our most recent panel featured three Muslim women from the community sharing about Ramadan and how their observances of the Holy Month have changed due to the pandemic. Even though COVID-19 is preventing Muslims from gathering with others to break the fast, Denira Valjevic, Sabriya Khan, Ayah Billbeisi welcomed us into their homes and shared a little bit of Ramadan with us!

We haven’t yet determined if these series will continue into the summer, but we will continue to work with our interfaith partners to help our community connect despite the physical distance. All of the previous sessions will continue to be available as videos on the Iowa Interfaith Exchange Facebook page—check them out!
We are in unexpected times. It’s hard for any of us to plan much for anything right now.

But there is one thing you can do to make sure the basic needs of our community continue to be met.

When you set up a monthly recurring donation to DMARC, it lets us know we can rely on your support now and into the future, whatever it may hold.

Show your support and set up a monthly recurring gift today!
dmarcunited.org/donate/