

A photograph of three people standing in front of a white mobile food pantry trailer. On the left is a man with a beard and a yellow beanie, wearing a dark blue polo shirt with the DMARC logo. In the middle is a man with a beard, wearing a dark blue zip-up jacket with the DMARC logo. On the right is a woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue zip-up jacket with the DMARC logo. The trailer behind them has the word 'move' in large blue letters and a circular logo with 'DMARC' and 'DES MOINES AREA RELIGIOUS COUNCIL'.

DMARC MOBILE FOOD PANTRY MARKS FIVE YEARS ON THE ROAD

BY LUKE ELZINGA, COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

Left to right: DMARC mobile food pantry associates Patrick Minor, Andrew Firestine, and Carrie La Rue.

The DMARC mobile food pantry program recently celebrated five years of operations. Mobile food pantries now provide food at over 30 locations, and the Refuel Station is at all eight club sites of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Iowa.

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READY TO RESPOND

BY MATT UNGER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

One question we have been asked regularly throughout the pandemic has been “what else should people know about food insecurity?” My answer has always been, and continues to be, food insecurity was a growing problem long before the pandemic. Additionally, I want the general public to understand that while the pandemic complicated and grew the universe of those in need of food assistance, we will see our greatest influx of people to our food pantry network once the pandemic ends.

At DMARC, we have shared about the many additional benefits available for those facing food insecurity as a result of pandemic response laws and policy changes. We’ve specifically highlighted correlations between increased SNAP benefits (called “Food Assistance” in Iowa by DHS, aka the former food stamp program) and lower numbers of monthly food pantry visitors.

We have explained how the increased (and much needed) benefit structure for the SNAP program—benefits being provided at their maximum level and a federally legislated 15% benefit increase overall to the program that sunsets at the end of September—has provided for folks such that they can use these benefits to meet the food needs of their families at the grocery store; which is an ideal situation. But we’ve seen before what happens when increased SNAP benefits end.

We experienced this with the Great Recession and the sunset of additional SNAP supports in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and again two years ago with the government shutdown in January of 2019 that saw February



SNAP benefits issued in January. In both these cases, we saw an immediate and marked increase in visits to our Food Pantry Network. We fully anticipate seeing such increases again this fall, when we are already experiencing our typically busiest time of the year (in the November before the pandemic, we assisted an all-time record of nearly 23,000 unique individuals that month alone). We are going to continue to need your support—financially, volunteering, food drives, all the ways you each support us will remain critical as the loss of these additional supports leave many folks asking, “what now?”

For many, we will be that “what.” As you hear often of less than desirable situations, for those currently facing food insecurity, it will likely get worse before it gets better. However, with the incredible support DMARC receives from all of you, and with our dedicated and strategic team that has been preparing for this to happen for months, we know we will be there to assist those in need while we continue to make lasting changes around those situations and systems that led to their being food insecure in the first place.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Unger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "U" at the end.

Matt Unger, CEO

MAKING DMARC A MORE EQUITABLE ORGANIZATION

BY MATT UNGER, CEO

One of the foundational pillars of the DMARC Food Pantry Network is equitable access to food. If you need food, you can get the same kind of food, the same quality, and the same amount, no matter where you live in the metro area.

The murder of George Floyd last summer and the ensuing calls for racial justice on a systemic level prompted DMARC to renew and expand our focus on equity to ensure that our organization is contributing to a more equitable community in all that we do. We established an Equity & Inclusion Committee with members of our staff to focus on making our organization and community a more equitable place for all.

Educating Ourselves

Last summer, DMARC staff and board members underwent a two-part implicit bias training to help us recognize some of our own biases and learn how we can work on addressing them. Our staff and board also participated in the United Way of Central Iowa's 21-Day Equity Challenge, and reflected together on what we learned. We continue to hold monthly educational sessions to learn from other organizations and individuals doing work in our community.

Re-evaluating Policies and Procedures

We examined our organization's policies and procedures to evaluate whether they contribute to a more or less equitable organization and community and made necessary changes.

We implemented changes to our hiring process to include salary ranges on all job postings, work with a third party to remove names during initial screenings of job applications to limit bias, and review how our job descriptions are written to re-evaluate which physical and mental requirements are necessary for each position.

We created a Food Pantry Equity Committee with representation from our food pantry partners to revise our ID policy and develop a food pantry visitor's "bill of rights" to clearly outline the expectations of respect and customer service our food pantry visitors are to receive, and how food pantry visitors can lodge a formal complaint.

Racial Disparities in Food Insecurity

In addition to this important internal work, DMARC also released a report, *Racial Disparities Among People Assisted by the DMARC Food Pantry Network*, which details the disparities in DMARC food pantry use by race and ethnicity among residents of Des Moines, Ankeny, Clive, Johnston, Urbandale, and West Des Moines in 2020.

These disparities are stark, and clearly demonstrate that while food insecurity is experienced by people of all races and ethnicities, non-white and Hispanic people in Greater Des Moines experience food insecurity and need to turn to food pantries for help at a disproportionately high rate.

We must all work together to find equitable solutions to food insecurity in Greater Des Moines, and one of the first steps in that process is acknowledging disparities as they exist today. Then, we need to start broadly exploring why that is—as individuals, organizations, a community and a state.

We will continue to educate ourselves, re-examine our policies through the lens of equity, and form new connections and partnerships. This is not a one-and-done project, this is now an integral part of how we fulfill our mission. We understand our work is just beginning.

Read and share the report:
dmarcunited.org/racial-disparities

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DMARC's first mobile food pantry started operation in July 2016. The first four sites of the mobile food pantry were Clive Community Services, the John R. Grubb YMCA, Norwoodville Senior Center, and the South Suburban YMCA.



Pantry visitors select their food items at a Des Moines Public School mobile food pantry site.

The DMARC mobile food pantry can be accessed like any other pantry in the DMARC Food Pantry Network. Visitors go through a short intake process to receive a three-day supply of food based on family size once per calendar month. The mobile food pantry also carries "Anytime Items" available daily with no intake process.

An on-board generator powers a refrigerator and freezer to keep produce and perishable items fresh. The fully-insulated trailer has air conditioning to keep people comfortable in the summer, and an LP-powered furnace to keep pantry visitors warm in the winter.

One goal of the mobile food pantry program is to meet people where they already are, whether that's at a senior center, low-income housing complex, public school, or other location where people are in need of food assistance. DMARC's data visualization dashboard has been incredibly helpful in identifying areas throughout Greater Des Moines of high need and low access to food.

In the first three months of operation of the mobile food pantry, over half of all pantry visitors were new to the DMARC Food Pantry Network.

The first DMARC mobile food pantry was made possible by the Polk County Board of Supervisors, the Partnership for a Hunger-Free Polk County, and two individual bequests.

In October 2018, DMARC added two more mobile food pantries to its fleet. One of the new pantries, dubbed The Refuel Station, was designed specifically to cater to children, with an art mural adorning the ceiling, child-friendly shelving, and single-serving food items that make choosing a healthy snack the easy choice. The Refuel Station now visits all eight club sites of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Iowa.

The second mobile food pantry and Refuel Station were made possible thanks to the generosity of Gregory and Suzie Glazer Burt, Charlotte and Fred Hubbell, Variety—the Children's Charity, and The Partnership for a Hunger-Free Polk County.



Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Iowa staff and club members tour the Refuel Station at its grand opening in October 2018.



DMARC mobile food pantry associate Patrick Minor assists a pantry visitor in April 2020.

As the number of mobile food pantry units and partner locations has grown, so too has DMARC's team of staff members. Joe Dolack first started at DMARC in April 2013 as a warehouse associate and driver, but when the opportunity arose in 2016, he became the mobile food pantry manager. Dolack now oversees three staff members and coordinates the mobile food pantry program and Refuel Station as DMARC's operations manager.

"I have loved being a part of the project from the beginning, as it's grown from an idea into reality, and to see the huge impact the mobile food pantry has had on our community," said Dolack.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the DMARC mobile food pantry saw a drastic increase in the number of people it was assisting, and for many of them, it was their first time using the DMARC Food Pantry Network. Even now, the combined mobile food pantry sites make up the 4th busiest food pantry in the entire DMARC Food Pantry Network.

DMARC expanded its partnership with Des Moines Public Schools in October 2020 to add 12 more mobile food pantry sites at K-12 schools across Des Moines. These mobile food pantry sites at schools provide food to anyone in the community seeking assistance and are not limited for use by students. On average, these mobile food pantry sites at DMPS schools have seen a higher share of first-time DMARC food pantry visitors when compared to the network as a whole.

In addition to their COVID-19 response, DMARC mobile food pantries have been able to quickly get food to people who need it in response to a number of other emergencies and disasters, including floods, apartment fires, and most recently, a fire at the facility of Clive Community Services in May 2021. While the building is undergoing repairs, the DMARC mobile food pantry has been on-site every Monday and Friday, ensuring people who rely on the pantry continue to have access to food.

The mobile food pantry program has allowed DMARC to stay flexible in responding to emerging food needs throughout Greater Des Moines. Only time will tell what's next for the mobile food pantry, but rest assured, DMARC will be ready to respond to whatever need arises, wherever it may be in Greater Des Moines.



Mobile food pantry associate Andrew Firestine (L) and operations manager Joe Dolack (R) providing food in response to a fire at an apartment complex.

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Working Together to Meet
Basic Human Needs.

STAFF:

MATT UNGER,

Chief Executive Officer

LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE,

Director of Development & Outreach

REBECCA WHITLOW,

Food Pantry Network Director

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CHRIS HAUGEN

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PAMPHILE "PHIL" KIWAYIELE

CARRIE LA RUE

JOHN McPHEE

PATRICK MINOR

MICHAEL SIROIS

REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT

KEN WITMER

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RYAN RUSSELL

MATTHEW STRAWN

EMILY WEBB

RON BEANE (Advisory)



BACK IN PERSON: INTERFAITH YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP 2021

DMARC and the Comparison Project at Drake University held their 5th annual Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp from July 14-18. Last year's camp was held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but this year the camp was back to being held at Drake University.

21 high school students and recent 2021 graduates participated in the camp, learning about each other's religious beliefs and practices (or lack thereof) and religious and cultural diversity in Greater Des Moines. The students also created digital storytelling projects about a personally meaningful faith experience and learned more about what it means to be an interfaith leader.

To watch a video recap of this year's camp, and to view the digital stories created by the campers, visit iowainterfaithexchange.com.



SAVE THE DATE: SPRING GREENS 2022

Join us at DMARC's fourth annual signature event, Spring Greens, on May 12, 2022, where we will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of DMARC! In 2021, DMARC raised over \$90,000 through Spring Greens, which was held at Colby Park in Windsor Heights on May 13.

GET CREATIVE IN HOSTING A DRIVE FOR DMARC

Now is the perfect time to start planning a food and fund drive for the DMARC Food Pantry Network—and we encourage you to get creative (and competitive) as you're planning one! There are some great upcoming opportunities to engage your workplace, congregation, club, neighborhood, organization, or other group in giving back, and having fun while doing so.



Iowa vs. Iowa State Football Game

Have your drive culminate in a tailgate event before the big game and see which team raised the most food and funds. Give a prize to the winning team or a light-hearted "punishment" to the losing team.

Halloween & Beggar's Night

Go trick or treating for food donations! Let your neighborhood know when you'll be picking up donations and be sure to wear fun costumes for the occasion. This is a great way to get youth involved in the fight against food insecurity!

Thanksgiving & Winter Holidays

Many organizations, businesses, and other groups hold holiday parties, and these events are perfect to pair with a food and fund drive for DMARC! To encourage donations, sell tickets for a door prize, hold contests, and think of other ways to spread holiday cheer through giving back.

Come up with your own creative ideas to raise food and funds for the DMARC Food Pantry Network—the more fun you can generate, the greater success your drive will have!

dmarcunited.org/host-a-drive

THE PLAYBOOK FOR HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL FOOD & FUND DRIVE

1 Planning Your Drive

Contact DMARC. Reach out to DMARC Volunteer & Outreach Manager Nisha Kishor at nkishor@dmarcunited.org to let us know you're planning on hosting a drive.

Determine what type of drive to host. Are you raising funds, food, personal care items, or all of the above?

Set a fundraising goal for your drive. This will motivate your team and give them a sense of accomplishment when they meet the goal!

2 Promoting Your Drive

Make a promotional plan. This will help you inform people of your drive and provide reminders for your team along the way. Getting your plan created and ready to launch will take away any stress.

3 Launching Your Drive

Start gathering donations. Be sure to let people know your goal and deadline.

Send notifications and updates. Give periodic updates throughout your drive and don't forget to make one final push for donations before your drive is complete.

4 Completing Your Drive

Count and box your donations. Package similar items together and put the number of items on the outside of the box. This helps DMARC save on time and labor.

Notify DMARC and drop off your donation. Contact DMARC with your results and let us know you will be dropping off your donation.

Share the results. Take a photo and share your results—and don't forget to mention DMARC and tag us on social media!



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

Des Moines Area Religious Council
1435 Mulberry Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

515.277.6969
dmarcunited.org

Warehouse: 515.282.2026
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 **Des Moines Area Religious Council**
 **@DMARCunited**

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JOIN THE "APPLE A DAY" GIVING CLUB!

For 45 years, members of our generous community have supported DMARC's efforts to successfully meet the needs of those in our community who face food insecurity.

Celebrate this accomplishment in meeting the need and join DMARC's "Apple a Day" giving club by making a recurring gift at whatever level—be it \$4.50 or \$45 per month.

Your donation will be used to efficiently and effectively help your neighbors while providing long-lasting stability to the organization.



dmarcunited.org/donate/donate-online

THE VOICE



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED