



CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF SERVICE : PART TWO

BY LUKE ELZINGA, COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY MANAGER

This article is the second installment of a two-part series on the history of DMARC.

With the retirement of Rev. Harold Varce as Executive Director of DMARC at the end of 1989, Rev. Forrest Harms was selected to lead the organization, beginning on January 2, 1990.

Just a few months later, on April 18, 1990, DMARC launched the Red Barrel Program to collect food donations from shoppers at local grocery stores.

This effort was spearheaded by local Kiwanis groups, and 32 years later, Kiwanis members still assist in picking up Red Barrel donations.

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THE END OF AN "ERA"

BY MATT UNGER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Summertime is here—for many that means patio parties with BBQ grilling, days at the local pool, and vacations to favorite summer places. But for many families summer means increased pressure to have enough food without the dependability of school breakfasts and lunches. This summer, things are even more complicated with the increased prices of, well, everything—food, gas, housing; you name it, it probably costs a lot more right now. That is not just for those we assist—our costs to provide assistance are up as well.

And unfortunately, along with the rising prices, our Food Pantry Network visitor numbers are up dramatically over last year. The last three months—April, May, and June—saw successive increases over the same months last year between 40-65%. And as I write this, the last two days (in early July) we provided assistance to over 1,000 individuals each day. We are almost at a return to the record levels we were seeing in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

Of course, we've been forecasting for quite some time that the worst impacts would come for those we assist once the pandemic "ended." As far as additional government assistance is concerned, the pandemic ended in Iowa as of April 1st. And as I just mentioned, we saw an immediate impact with a 42% increase in the number of unique individuals who visited the food pantry network compared to last April. Some of this is related to increased costs, but more impactful is the reduction in SNAP benefits that was triggered by the "end" of the pandemic. Sometimes you wish your predictions were not correct.

That being said, I feel so very fortunate that we were able to move into our new headquarters at 100 Army Post Road the last week of March. Frankly, with the increases we're seeing and the amount of food our pantry partners across the network require to meet the need, our getting into the new building could not have happened at a better time. It is the only reason we have been able to have enough on hand to ensure the network has what it needs. I cannot say "thank you" enough to all of you who helped make it possible for us to be here.

I also want to recognize our 14 network pantry partners. They always do amazing work, but the volume increases they have seen the last few months—some above levels they have EVER seen—are difficult to handle, but they do it so well. And it is not just that they do it well, but always with that eye to making sure our pantry visitors have a dignified experience on what might be their hardest day. Very soon we will open our on-site pantry that should provide a little relief to our busiest and geographically nearest network partner, Bidwell Riverside, and also offer some additional pantry access at times that our network is not currently open. Stay tuned for more on this, but we anticipate opening the pantry in September. And we will need volunteers!

I don't want to leave anyone making Chicken Little comparisons, but the volume we are seeing this summer has us very concerned about what we might see this fall. November is always our busiest month, and in 2019 we had our all time busiest month ever, assisting nearly 23,000 unique individuals. Unfortunately, I see that record likely to be broken this November. But as is always the case, with the support we get from folks like you, we will be there for those who need us.



Matt Unger
Chief Executive Officer

THE LAST MILE IS THE LONGEST—BUT YOU CAN HELP!

BY LESLIE L. GARMAN, CFRE, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT & OUTREACH

We are so grateful for the outpouring of support we have received for our capital campaign. Gifts toward our "Food Today, Change Tomorrow" Capital Campaign made it possible for us to move to our new facility at 100 Army Post Road earlier this year, and not a minute too soon!

We knew that for organizations like ours, the real hurt would come once additional pandemic assistance had ended. But we did not expect this steep of an increase. Nor did we expect the stark increase in the number of folks seeking pantry assistance who had never been to a DMARC pantry before. That number has increased greater than 100% in each of the last three months.

Of course, DMARC's costs have all increased as well, but in this new building we can purchase at larger quantities for lower costs and take in donations that we couldn't have said "yes" to before. Today we are able to say "yes" to full truckloads of food that are distributed to our partner pantries, helping those who walk through their front doors.



DMARC's new warehouse has three times the food storage capacity, and six times the cold storage.

Your help has led us to this point. We're in the home stretch, with less than \$1 million yet to raise to reach our goal. As most know, the last mile is often the longest. Your help at this critical time has the potential to help us reach the finish line.

The sooner we are able to reach the finish line of our capital campaign, the sooner we can return our focus to our core work—meeting the basic human needs of our community. Unfortunately, it appears that the number of people who will need our help will only increase in the near future.



DMARC board president Denise Bubeck (L) and Director of Development & Outreach Leslie L. Garman (R) at the Grand Opening of 100 Army Post Road on May 26, 2022.

Thank you again for your help and support. We look forward to giving many, many tours of DMARC soon!

If you are interested in a tour of our new facility, or would like to speak with someone about how you can help us finish the "last mile" of our capital campaign, you can reach me at (515) 277-6969 or lgarman@dmarcunited.org.

Make your contribution today:
dmarcunited.org/capital-campaign

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In 1993, Des Moines was hit with record flooding. The entire city was without power and clean water. Donations came pouring in from across the country, and staff and volunteers worked tirelessly for three weeks to provide assistance to residents through the Emergency Food Pantry and Compassion in Action program. A high level of community need persisted for many months, while governmental support and resources ended.



Rev. Forrest Harms (L) and Larry Myers (R) at DMARC's Interfaith Brunch in 2004.

As Forrest Harms put it at the time, “DMARC was serving people prior to the crisis, served even more people during the crisis, and will be serving people after the immediate crisis is past.”

In 1995, Food Pantry Director Chuck Ryan moved on to other employment, and Sister Sandra Rodemyer was hired to replace him.

The following year, Ken McDougall became DMARC's first Development Director. This was an important addition to DMARC's staff that would provide the organization with greater financial stability and diversify its sources of support.

Due to welfare reform efforts in the state of Iowa in 1993, and nationwide in 1996, DMARC's social service programs began seeing a greater number of people requesting assistance for help with food, childcare expenses, and rent and utility payments.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, DMARC and other interfaith groups redoubled efforts to come together through interfaith learning and dialogue, stressing the importance of building relationships with people of other faiths. In 2005, DMARC welcomed its first Muslim congregation as a member.

In 2007, both Rev. Forrest Harms and Sister Sandy announced their retirements. Sister Sandy and Forrest Harms made tremendous strides in advancing the work of DMARC while navigating tight financial constraints.

Rev. Sarai Schnucker Rice took over as Executive Director on February 1, 2008, and Jim Trotter became director of the Emergency Food Pantry.

Under the leadership of Sarai Rice, DMARC took a close look at its role in the local food system. The "Mapping an End to Hunger" initiative was launched in September 2009, and would lead to major changes in Greater Des Moines' emergency food system.

DMARC purchased a van in 2009, and now had a vehicle of its own for picking up and dropping off food across Greater Des Moines. It also launched a new website, MovetheFood.org, to connect people with food resources around the metro.



Sr. Sandra Rodemyer (R) receiving the Iowa Star Award from the Des Moines Register in 2008.

The Emergency Food Pantry shifted to a health-based food supply at its food pantries in 2010, focusing on providing fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy options of non-perishable goods.

In 2012, the Emergency Food Pantry was renamed as the DMARC Food Pantry Network to more accurately describe its work and role. Becky Whitlow took over as Food Pantry Network Director. The Food Pantry Network continued to evolve, as food pantries got rid of boundary requirements for service, an intake database was set up, and food pantries started the shift to allowing visitors to select their own food items, rather than providing pre-packed bags.



A ribbon-cutting ceremony at 1435 Mulberry St.

Due to the rapid increase in the number of people being assisted, and the change to providing healthy food, it was very clear that DMARC needed to find a new place to call home. The lease at 36th Street was also coming to an end.

In early 2013, an opportunity arose at the old Central Iowa Shelter and Services building on Mulberry Street in Downtown Des Moines. DMARC purchased the location in July 2013 and launched a \$1.3 million capital campaign to cover the cost and remodeling for the location. DMARC opened its new headquarters at 1435 Mulberry Street on January 20, 2014.

2016 proved to be another year of innovation and growth for DMARC. In January, DMARC opened a second warehouse on Scott Street thanks to support from the Polk County supervisors and their Hunger Free Polk County initiative. In July, DMARC unveiled a long-time dream: a mobile food pantry that could travel around the metro to bring a food pantry right to where people needed it.

In 2019, Rev. Sarai Schnucker Rice announced her retirement from DMARC after 11 years of serving as its Executive Director. Matt Unger took the helm as CEO that summer, becoming the first lay leader of the organization.

2020 was another major milestone in DMARC's history with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. DMARC remained nimble in providing food during a pandemic while protecting the safety of staff, volunteers, and food pantry visitors. Many changes were made at DMARC and its partner pantries, including the launch of a no-contact home delivery service and the distribution of USDA Farmers to Families Food Boxes.

In 2021, DMARC began looking in earnest for a new location to call home. After only seven years on Mulberry Street, it was very evident that more space was needed.

DMARC explored several different options, but finally landed at 100 Army Post Road. It launched the "Food Today, Change Tomorrow" capital campaign to raise \$5.8 million to purchase and renovate the facility. The new headquarters expanded warehouse space, provided community and training rooms, and had dedicated space for an on-site food pantry, a first for DMARC.



Rev. Sarai Schnucker Rice (center-right) celebrating 10 years as Executive Director of DMARC in 2018.

In some ways, DMARC has changed immensely in its seven decades of service to the community. And throughout it all, DMARC has remained steadfast in its mission of bringing people together to meet basic human needs.

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

DANIEL BECK

MONICA CURL

JEFFREY CZERWIEC

JOE DOLACK

LUKE ELZINGA

ANDREW FIRESTINE

CHRIS HAUGEN

NISHA KISHOR

PAMPHILE KIWAYIELE

JOHN McPHEE

PATRICK MINOR

MICHAEL SIROIS

REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT

KEN WITMER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, FY23:

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IHSAN YASEEN,

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TARA KRAMER

REV. RACHEL MITHELMAN

STUART OXER

REV. RYAN RUSSELL

MATTHEW STRAWN

EMILY WEBB

RON BEANE (Advisory)

DMARC WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS

DMARC recently welcomed two new members to its board of directors: Shashank Aurora and Tara Kramer.

Shashank Aurora is the Chief Financial Officer at Des Moines Public Schools. Prior to joining DMPS, Shashank held a number of positions in corporate finance across the globe. He brings a wealth of expertise in finance to DMARC.



Tara Kramer is a community volunteer with The Supply Hive, DSM BLM and DSM People's Townhall. She is a member of DMARC's advocacy committee and co-founder of DMARC's Storytellers Roundtable project. Tara has participated in 10+ interviews with journalists across the nation discussing the reduction in SNAP benefits and its impact on her health.

VOLUNTEER AT MEALS FROM THE MARKET



Each Saturday morning during the summer, the Meals from the Market program collects donations from vendors at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers' Market.

DMARC is currently seeking 10-15 volunteers to collect donations during each Downtown Farmers' Market. If you are interested, please contact Nisha Kishor, nkishor@dmarcunited.org or (515) 277-6969 x 220.

IOWA CUBS SUNDAY HOME GAMES

At every Iowa Cubs Sunday home game this summer, DMARC will be accepting three food items as a donation in exchange for one general admission ticket. Fans can also pay \$5 to upgrade to a Grand Stand seat. DMARC is looking for volunteers to assist with this effort. If you are interested, please visit dmarcunited.org/volunteer.



DMARC PARTNERS WITH DOORDASH TO EXPAND NO-CONTACT FOOD PANTRY DELIVERY SERVICE

BY JOE DOLACK, OPERATIONS MANAGER

DMARC's no-contact home delivery program was fast-tracked out of necessity. With the onset of COVID-19, we needed to adjust our model to meet community members where they were—and a large part of the vulnerable population that we assist were being asked to stay home. We had community health partners asking for food assistance for people needing to quarantine. And even prior to the pandemic, many members of the community had transportation barriers that made it difficult to visit food pantry locations.

There was no question, DMARC needed to meet the need. Not only to help relieve hunger, but to help keep our community safe. Without vaccines, and a healthcare system strained beyond its capacity, there was a fear—and rightfully so—for people to venture out and get food. DMARC became the direct referral for the health systems and health department for those that were in quarantine.

We received an overwhelming amount of support from volunteers and other organizations to help deliver food across the metro, including DART and Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa. In addition to volunteer drivers, we also worked with small groups of volunteers to come in and get bags of food packed for delivery. Volunteers are and have been the success of this program. From answering phones, to being the smiling face dropping off bags of food on people's doorsteps, without our volunteers we would never have been able to keep this program running.

Now, DMARC has a new opportunity to partner with DoorDash, opening up the potential for additional services and removing barriers that still exist. With this new partnership, we will be able to offer evening and same-day deliveries, and are exploring options to extend our delivery area.



"One morning a week I take calls for the home delivery service. Food insecurity is a huge issue at this time. Everyone in the community needs to pay attention to this problem and do what they can to change it." —Rosemary Thierer

We are also hoping to add a greater level of choice for people utilizing our delivery program.

Our new partnership with DoorDash is allowing us to refocus the efforts of our volunteers. We are now recruiting additional volunteers to help answer our delivery hotline and guide callers through the intake process.

The delivery program was just a dream before the pandemic. However, COVID-19 made the "dream" an absolute necessity for our community, and now we are able to continue providing this service into the future.

Sign up to volunteer today at:
dmarcunited.org/volunteer



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

Des Moines Area Religious Council
100 Army Post Road
Des Moines, Iowa 50315

(515) 277.6969
dmarcunited.org

 **Des Moines Area Religious Council**
 **@DMARcunited**

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Portrait of a Food Pantry Visitor

Data, Demographics, and Disparities

DMARC recently released a new report, "Portrait of a Food Pantry Visitor: Data, Demographics, and Disparities." This report aims to highlight current disparities among food pantry visitors related to race and ethnicity, gender, and age. It is our hope that this report will inform the public and policy makers about these disparities, why they exist, and potential ways we can remedy them in our community.

We encourage our supporters to read the report and its key findings, look at our areas of opportunity to address these disparities, and educate your community on the disparities that exist in our community.

dmarcunited.org/disparities

THE VOICE



UNITED TO MEET THE NEED