

# ADJUSTING TO



**BY BLAKE WILLADSEN**  
**MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER**

On Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2023, 1,614 unique individuals were assisted through the DMARC Food Pantry Network. The dust had barely settled on the new year, but already the DMARC network was seeing a single-day record and signs of what might be to come.

Why are food pantries seeing such an influx as we enter a new year?

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## SERVING UP HOPE IN THE NEW YEAR

BY MATT UNGER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

It's beginning to become a bit of a familiar refrain, but 2022 was yet another year unlike any other. While we faced some incredible challenges we also experienced some incredible successes together. Early in the year we had held our collective breath as we waited to find out when the Governor would end the proclamation of a public health disaster due to the pandemic; knowing that would bring about massive changes to safety net programs, particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Around this same time, contractors were putting the finishing touches on our new headquarters at 100 Army Post Road (if you haven't been out to see us, you have to come check it out!). You've heard from me the many ways this new space has expanded our ability to make an impact - but it's hard to emphasize how crucial the timing of our move was. We moved in the last week of March - that proclamation was ending in parallel and SNAP would be reverting to its pre-pandemic allotments on April 1st. Imagine being one of the many having to adjust from \$250/month of SNAP benefits down to \$24/month.

That month we would see a 42% increase in the number of pantry visitors compared to the same month the previous year. This volume would continue rising month after month, reaching as high as an 86% increase in August over the prior year.

Had we not moved into Army Post when we did, I PROMISE YOU, we would not have been able to adequately provide for our food pantry network to be able to meet the increasing needs that developed the rest of the year. You all helped to

make that possible and tens of thousands of central Iowans were able to have access to healthy food, personal care products, and food for their pets because you did.

2022 also brought a return in-person to our signature interfaith events such as the Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp and our Meet My Religious Neighbor Series to explore different world faiths. Interfaith Youth Leadership Camp is a partnership with the Comparison Project at Drake University and is now eclipsing over 100 alums in its sixth year.

Our interfaith foundation remains a critical piece of who DMARC is and what makes us unique as an organization. Many of you are also the reason this work remains possible as well.

Unfortunately, 2023 is going to be another one of those years where we will have our work cut out for us. I'm writing this on Groundhog Day, and like the movie, it's the same thing all over again at the legislature. We are once again fighting onerous changes to the SNAP program that would make it less accessible and push people off the program who really need it. But we now have Luke Elzinga in a full time role guiding our advocacy and building coalitions to at minimum change pieces of this legislation and at best, defeat them outright. The number of visitors to our food pantry network continues to rebound to the record-breaking levels we were experiencing before the pandemic and nothing will more negatively impact that than weakening the best safety net program we have in SNAP.

While SNAP provides our best defense in the fight against food insecurity, a close second is the caring community of support behind our efforts that we have in all of you. We will meet the challenges of 2023 together and a year from now, maybe it won't be the familiar sound of Sonny and Cher that wakes us from our slumber this time. Until then, I remain ever grateful that "we've got you babe."



## OH, WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

### ADDRESSING AND INNOVATING AROUND FOOD INSECURITY

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

Relocating to 100 Army Post Road was much more than adding additional square feet to a building. It was key to meeting a moral imperative: without more space, we could no longer guarantee our capacity to match the growing need for food assistance. This would knowingly leave some of our most vulnerable neighbors without access to food. Forgive the pun, but that was simply NOT palatable. DMARC moved to its previous home in 2014. We certainly didn't expect to move again in 2022, but the number of individuals visiting the DMARC Food Pantry Network had increased a staggering 82 percent in less than 7 years!

**On top of this growing need, here are the biggest reasons we decided to move:**



BEFORE

TODAY

#### **We increased our capacity to meet the need.**

Lack of storage limited DMARC's buying power and ability to accept large in-kind donations such as produce and other fresh items that are expensive to purchase. In 2021, prior to our move, DMARC was forced to refuse donations of milk, half and full semi-truck loads of meat, and pallets of produce due to limited refrigerator and freezer space. Lack of storage also hindered our ability to provide consistent storage of culturally specific foods for refugee and immigrant populations that utilize the DMARC Food Pantry Network. The needs of our community had simply exceeded our storage capacity.

#### **We increased efficiencies.**

By relocating and consolidating our warehouses and headquarters we streamlined operations and maximized our ability to meet the need, reducing travel costs, expanding storage capacity, enhancing purchasing volume, allowing DMARC to grow as the needs in our community grew also.

#### **We were able to better meet the needs of our neighbors on the Southside.**

The opening of our own DMARC-ket Southside Food Pantry in September has already proven the need for additional services in this area of our community. Since opening, DMARC has assisted thousands at this site and interest continues to grow. This space has also served as a catalyst for the creation of a "Care Corridor": a collaboration of nonprofit neighbors who will work together to find ways to make our services more accessible for those we assist.

Moving forward, this space will be an open table for collaboration and innovation around addressing food insecurity in our community. We are expanding ongoing programming like DMARC Hunger Simulations and the DMARC Storytellers Roundtable and other opportunities with partners.

We yet have \$1M to raise and every dollar counts. Won't you help?

Give today: [dmarcunited.org/capital-campaign](https://dmarcunited.org/capital-campaign)

Questions? Contact Leslie Garman, CFRE at [Lgarman@dmarcunited.org](mailto:Lgarman@dmarcunited.org).

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As pandemic assistance wanes and rising costs usher in a new normal, people in the metro are being asked to do more with less. The continued impact of inflation and shortages add to the challenge of finding consistent solutions to purchasing food items in bulk.

**Pandemic ends on paper but effects linger for families**

One of the most reliable indicators that the DMARC Food Pantry Network will see an increase in visitors is a reduction in government assistance provided through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Last April, Iowa households enrolled in SNAP saw their benefits drop by an average of \$200 per month with the ending of SNAP Emergency Allotments in the state.

When these additional SNAP benefits ended, many people experiencing food insecurity sought out food pantries to help them provide for their families. This led to double-digit percentage increases in use across the DMARC Food Pantry Network, including an 86 percent increase in the number of individuals assisted in August 2022 compared to the year prior.

A staggering 1 in 6 people living in the city of Des Moines utilized the DMARC Food Pantry

The average purchasing price for DMARC in...



Network in 2022. Nearly half of everyone assisted in 2022 only visited a food pantry site once or twice in the calendar year.

**Making DMARC's purchasing power count**

While the need continues to grow in the community, DMARC faces unique challenges in purchasing items due to record inflation and shortages. Logistics and supply chain issues have also become commonplace and impact DMARC's ability to purchase pantry staples like eggs and meat. While inflation peaked in summer of 2022, certain costs remain higher due to the increase in the cost of transportation.

DMARC can typically purchase wholesale items at 30 to 50 percent cheaper than the cost at your local retailer.



**Finding solutions one day at a time**

DMARC is rising to meet the challenge as our staff and network food pantries learn to navigate uncertainty and come up with creative solutions. DMARC opened a new warehouse and headquarters at 100 Army Post Road in spring of 2022 and later opened the DMARC-ket Southside Food Pantry in the fall.

The addition of warehouse space has made it possible to purchase larger quantities of items or receive bulk donations to reduce the impact of transportation. The increased storage space also has reduced the time it takes to get that food on pantry shelves. Being able to receive an entire semi's worth of a pantry staple as opposed to a couple pallets is a game changer when some food items are facing delays of up to three months.

Since opening in the fall, the DMARC-ket Southside pantry is expanding the reach of our network as more and more people choose to visit the new location. It has since become the 5th busiest location in the DMARC network in 2023. This is the first brick and mortar pantry in the DMARC network that is operated by DMARC staff and has already expanded its operating hours to meet the growing need.

While the challenges continue for folks across our community, DMARC will lead with optimism as the work of creating a robust Food Pantry Network continues. The DMARC Food Pantry Network is more ready than ever to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

# 2022

by the numbers

## 48%

**OF PANTRY USERS ONLY VISITED 1-2 TIMES A YEAR**

## 34.6%

**WERE 17 YEARS OR YOUNGER**

# 1 IN 6

**CITY OF DES MOINES RESIDENTS UTILIZED A DMARC PANTRY**

## 53% ↑

**INCREASE OF NEW PANTRY USERS COMPARED TO 2021**



# 53,073

**individuals assisted in 2022.**

## 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**

**MICHELLE CHUMBLEY**

**MONICA CURL**

**JEFFREY CZERWIEC**

**JOE DOLACK**

**LUKE ELZINGA**

**CARL EVANS**

**ANDREW FIRESTINE**

**CHRIS HAUGEN**

**PAMPHILE KIWAYIELE**

**JOHN MCPHEE**

**PATRICK MINOR**

**AMANDA PARKINS**

**REV. SARAH TRONE GARRIOTT**

**BLAKE WILLADSEN**

**KEN WITMER**

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President

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**MATTHEW STRAWN**

**EMILY WEBB**

**RON BEANE** (Advisory)

# DMARCH MADNESS

Every bracket / \$20 donation = to 33 healthy meals to those in need.

## TIP OFF EVENT: TUESDAY, MAR. 14 4-6 P.M. AT BIG GROVE BREWERY

The third annual DMARCh Madness hosted by DMARC YP Group returns this March. Get ready for your one shining moment by building your bracket, supporting DMARC and earning the chance to win big prizes. Make a suggested donation of \$20 and join the DMARCh Madness bracket pool to be entered. Whether you make your picks with hours of research or pick the coolest mascots, everyone can be a winner. Prizes will be awarded to best and worst overall bracket.

Not a bracket person? Hold a food and fund drive at your congregation or workplace and we will provide donation bins and everything you need to make your drive a slam dunk.

## LET THE MADNESS BEGIN!

LEARN MORE AT: [DMARCUNITED.ORG/DMARCH-MADNESS](https://DMARCUNITED.ORG/DMARCH-MADNESS)



## DOUGLAS M. WOODS MEMORIAL HUNGER CHALLENGE MARCH 1-31, 2023

Every single person has the opportunity to make a positive difference in their community. Doug Woods was one such person who found delight in giving and made a lasting difference in his community. DMARC will forever be inspired by and grateful for his spirit of generosity. Since the first initiative in 2013, the Doug Woods Challenge has raised over \$800k to support DMARC. We are truly grateful to the family of Douglas M. Woods who has decided to carry on his legacy.

*Take the challenge and make a gift,  
visit [dmarcunited.org/donate](https://dmarcunited.org/donate)*

## WHEELS ON THE BUS, FOOD ON THE SHELVES

BY JOE DOLACK, OPERATIONS MANAGER

Transportation has long been a barrier for people looking to access a food pantry. Learning to meet that need sparked an idea and partnership between Des Moines Area Regional Transit (DART) and DMARC.

Since 2018, the mobile pantry site at DART Central station has operated every Thursday and has become one of the most utilized mobile sites that DMARC operates. Being downtown or along a dedicated route to larger employers helps us reach folks who may not otherwise find a pantry site.

"Public transit reduces barriers and helps people access essential services, education and employment opportunities they may not otherwise have," Chief External Affairs Officer at DART, Erin Hockman said. "Hosting the mobile food pantry at DART Central Station is one more way we can reduce barriers for central Iowans who need access to food."

This location provides food assistance to a higher percentage of those that are unhoused for the Monthly Core Supply and daily AnyTime items, than any other Mobile Pantry Site. Over 4,000 individuals have utilized this pantry

*"If we can place a Mobile  
Pantry in the middle of DART  
Central Station at rush hour,  
then we can place a Mobile  
Pantry site anywhere,"*

*- DMARC Operations Manager, Joe Dolack*

site and received over 61,000 food items from the staple monthly food supply. Many more visitors also utilize the mobile pantry weekly to stock up on AnyTime daily items.

The success of the Mobile Pantry site at DART has a lot to do with the collaboration of both organizations. DART continually has promoted the opportunity to its riders which has played a strong role in its continued success.

The lessons learned from this partnership have helped DMARC continue to reach people accessing food pantries where they are at in life.





UNITED TO MEET THE NEED

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

(515) 277.6969  
[dmarcunited.org](http://dmarcunited.org)

**Des Moines Area Religious Council**  
 **@DMARCunited**

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
DES MOINES, IOWA  
Permit No. 2934

THE VOICE

# SPRING GREENS

THINK SPRING. THINK FRESH. THINK GREEN!

## DMARC'S SIGNATURE EVENT RETURNS MAY 4 AT CAPITAL SQUARE.

Join us for a seat at the table in the fight against food insecurity.

Help us grow our impact this year! Become a sponsor, provide silent auction items, and more!



**Learn more at:** [dmarcunited.org/spring-greens](http://dmarcunited.org/spring-greens)

Contact Leslie Garman at 515-277-6969 or [LGarman@dmarcunited.org](mailto:LGarman@dmarcunited.org)

