



WINTER 2021

Volunteer, Sheila Barron stocks the shelves at the new Food Pantry at Pepperwood Plaza, located at 1045 Highway 6 East in Iowa City. Photo by Jason Smith, Little Village Creative Services.

PEPPERWOOD PANTRY

Settling into the New Space

The hum of the saws have ceased, the hammering of nails has quieted, and the dust has settled at the Food Pantry at Pepperwood Plaza. It's hard to believe that the new space has been open for nearly three months. It has been a long journey, but the improved experience for clients, volunteers, and staff has been well worth it.

Thank you for your support in helping CommUnity make this dream a reality. The new facility enabled the food pantry to return to "client choice", a model that allows clients to select all of their own items. This service model helps more clients to meet their unique dietary needs, as well as reducing food waste associated with pre-packaged bags. It also provides a warm environment for community members to select groceries during these cold winter months.

"Things are safe, well-organized, and clients are so happy to shop inside again," said Colleen Schilling, food pantry volunteer.

Our top priority in transitioning to the new facility has been to enhance the safety of our clients, volunteers, and staff. We have implemented many safety measures including plexiglass in the check-in area, numerous hand sanitizing stations throughout the facility, a larger waiting area, a microsprayer to disinfect surfaces, a pager system to limit the number of clients in the shopping area at one time, and free face masks, face shields and gloves.

"I have only volunteered at the Pepperwood Plaza and find that venue extremely accessible for the population it serves," said Karen Andrusiak, food pantry volunteer. "There is ample parking, the space is conducive to grocery shopping, and is large enough to practice social distancing."

Our first Project Holiday in the new space was a great success. We served 1,242 families, providing each of them with the ingredients to

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make a holiday meal and a chance to celebrate during a year filled with heaviness. For the first time ever, we also offered delivery service to make sure that anyone residing in Johnson County could access a meal without barriers to transportation.

Since the Food Pantry at Pepperwood Plaza opened in November, CommUnity has seen 6,000 client visits. In December alone, we saw 3,270 client visits, a 32% increase over the monthly average so far this year.*

We are proud to be meeting the needs of so many families in our community and look forward to what the new year will bring at the Food Pantry at Pepperwood Plaza.

*refers to the 2021 Fiscal Year

DRIVEN TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

How Debbie Gives Back to CommUnity

One visit to CommUnity Crisis Service and Food Bank's new Pepperwood Plaza food pantry and Debbie knew she had found the right place to volunteer.

"My favorite part is that there's a lot of camaraderie between the volunteers, and it's so well organized," she said.

What started out as helping out her church with coordinating CommUnity's Project Holiday information for their congregation turned into something more.

"Signing up to volunteer with CommUnity was so simple! I love that the signup is online. I can just go on and see when help is needed and when I'm available. I can volunteer on Wednesday morning this week, but maybe Friday afternoon next week because schedules change. I appreciate that it's not a year-long

commitment on a certain day at a certain time. I like that it's flexible," Debbie explained.

Since COVID-19, Debbie has seen the needs of many people grow and is grateful to have the chance to continue to help.

"I have no concerns about COVID-19 in the space at all. The garage door is usually open so there's always fresh air, the tasks I've been doing aren't really next to people, and we're well enough away from clients."

Volunteering is one of the most rewarding ways to be involved with CommUnity's food pantry. As a volunteer-driven organization, our food pantry volunteers are so crucial—assisting every day in the warehouse, stocking food, helping clients, and with data entry.



A new video is showcasing the Food Pantry at Pepperwood Plaza is now available at bit.ly/pepperwood-tour.



Interested in volunteering?
We offer a variety of opportunities.
Visit www.builtbycommunity.org/volunteer to learn more.

GOING VIRTUAL

Developing an Online Suicide Intervention Training for Volunteers

CommUnity's Crisis Intervention program has offered online training for volunteers since 2018. The online training program was originally developed to address general crisis intervention skills, best practices, and to give volunteers an opportunity to practice those skills. Previously, volunteers would complete the online training on their own schedule, followed by a two-day in-person Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST by Livingworks). Due to COVID-19, we have independently developed a separate online suicide intervention training program so that participants can complete the entire program remotely. This expanded curriculum includes role plays with Crisis Intervention staff and mentorship.

"It trains you how to address general crises—anything from having a bad day and just needing to talk to somebody all the way up to, 'I'm feeling suicidal and I don't know how to handle that,'" said Ryan Dickson, Crisis Intervention Program Manager.

In addition to providing a solution to safely train volunteers in response to COVID-19, the online training has helped CommUnity expand our volunteer pool to include people who would not be able to make it to an in-person training, such as those with non-traditional schedules or people who live outside of the area.

"The biggest reason that people give for becoming a Crisis Intervention vol-

unteer is that they want to be helpful in a way that they find meaningful. They want to have an impact in someone's life that is literally life-changing," said Dickson. "With the online training, they have the flexibility to complete the coursework at their own pace while acquiring the skills they need to have that kind of impact."

So far, 278 people have enrolled in the online training, with an additional 260 on the waiting list. Many of the new volunteers are students, both locally and throughout the United States.

"Everyone who volunteers is here for deeply intrinsic reasons; they truly care about wanting to help people," said Dickson.

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While other organizations offer online training in some form, CommUnity's program is unique in providing an extensive level of support and mentorship for all volunteers. Both throughout the training program and volunteer shifts, experienced Crisis Intervention staff members provide supervision and guidance to ensure that volunteers have mastered the material demonstrating that they have the skills needed to help people in crisis.

"It's amazing to know that you were able to help someone choose life through the conversation you had with them," Dickson said.

BASIC NEEDS PROGRAM SEES INCREASED DEMAND IN DECEMBER



CommUnity's Basic Needs program provides \$100 towards past-due rent, water, and energy bills for Johnson County residents.

ANSWERING CRISIS TEXTS NATIONWIDE

CommUnity Participates in Pilot for National Suicide Prevention Lifeline



The pilot program was created to test the impacts of offering a text messaging service and gather data on the potential volume of crisis texts to NSPL. NSPL had evidence that people in crisis were attempting to text the crisis line number, but did not have a way to respond to those messages before implementing this program.

"They could tell that they were getting a significant number of texts to the lines, which means there are a ton of people out there in crisis not getting help," said Ryan Dickson, Crisis Intervention Program Manager at CommUnity.

Since the program began in August, CommUnity has answered over 2,500 texts for Lifeline.

Through demographic analysis of our crisis contacts, we know that many children and young adults prefer the medium of text messaging over phone calls. By offering the convenience of their preferred method of communication, we are increasing accessibility.

"Increasingly, our demographics for this service are trending towards the

younger age ranges. Older populations seem to have always preferred calls, younger folks prefer the digital medium of chat or text," explained Dickson.

In addition to providing life-saving emotional support, the text service has also helped identify children in dangerous living situations. As schools went online due to COVID-19 and children were forced to spend more time at home, children in abusive environments were left with less direct access to supportive adults who could help them. Many of them reached out to the crisis text line.

"They reached out to us and as mandatory reporters, it is our duty to call it in and report. These kids texted the crisis line and got the help that they needed," Dickson said. "It's heart-breaking, but it's also really important to the work that we do."

A sense of the deep value of this work is what motivates our staff and volunteers. We are proud to be providing this service nationwide and grateful to be a trusted support through some of life's most difficult challenges.



A volunteer pours pancakes onto the griddle at Our Redeemer's 2020 Pancake Breakfast, CommUnity's last event before the pandemic prevented in-person gatherings.

RE-IMAGINING THE 2021 PANCAKE BREAKFAST

Taking Pancake Day to Local Restaurants

Each year, we look forward to the good fellowship and great food that come hand and hand with the Annual Pancake Breakfast held at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church (ORLC) since 2011. The benefit fundraiser for CommUnity Crisis Services and Food Bank draws hundreds of community members who look forward to visiting with friends around plates filled with pancakes hot off the griddle and fresh pork sausage.

Typically held the first Saturday in March, this year's anticipated date of March 6, would have been the final big event for our retiring Executive Director, Becci Reedus. In her nearly 13 years with CommUnity, the Pancake Breakfast has become one of Becci's favorite things to look forward to. "I think a lot of people associate the Pancake Breakfast with spring. It's a sign that there are brighter days ahead."

In the challenging times we're living in, this sentiment has more meaning than ever. We recognize the impact of this event on our organization and on the

Iowa City community, which is what made this decision so difficult.

The 2021 Pancake Breakfast will take on a new look this year due to COVID-19. While we won't be able to host our friends in person, we are hopeful to bring the Pancake Breakfast back in 2022. We are so grateful for Our Redeemer's continued support over the last 10 years and through the pandemic.

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church will be collecting donations for CommUnity from members of its congregation and the community. Contributions can be made at builtbycommunity.org/pancake-day or by mail to ORLC with "Pancake Day" in the check memo.

CommUnity also plans to partner with local restaurants to put on a restaurant week in early March. Supporters will be able to purchase breakfast, lunch, or dinner from participating restaurants and a portion of proceeds will be donated to the organization. Follow CommUnity on social media and signup for our e-newsletter for updates!

Upcoming Events

February
Spread the Love

March
Pancake Breakfast

April
Shower CommUnity

May
Mental Health
Awareness Month

June
Strike Out Hunger
Fan Club
Hunger Banquet

July
Strike Out Hunger
Fan Club

August
Strike Out Hunger

September
Suicide Prevention Month

October
51st Anniversary Celebration
TP CommUnity
World Mental Health Day

December
Project Holiday



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