

SPRING NEWSLETTER

Community Needs are Warming Up

It is difficult to express the situation our community is in right now. We are so grateful to be a part of a generous, caring community full of people who truly care about their neighbors. Our supporters are always willing to answer the call to support those in crisis, and we couldn't provide support at the level we currently do without our donors and volunteers. However, the current economic climate has created an urgent situation at our Food Bank.

Inflation and rising interest rates have increased the need for food and financial support in our community. Record numbers of families are shopping at the Food Bank, and it's been difficult to keep up with service demands. From January to February, we saw an increase of 1,640 visits to the Food Bank.

While demand for support is up, food and financial

donations are both down, and our inventory is scarce. Everyone's financial situation has been affected by inflation in the past year, and in-kind donations decreased from almost 15,000 lbs. of food in December to just over 5,000 lbs. in February.

It is the nature of funding for food pantries to rely heavily on individual support. In fact, 90% of funding for our Food Bank and Financial Support programs comes from individuals like you. Why? Because it is atypical for programs like these to receive sustainable grant funding, leaving these vital services to the mercy of the annual giving cycle. We need your help to smooth the curve and feed our neighbors amidst the economic uncertainty we are all experiencing this spring.

We understand every budget shrank this year, but if you are able to help, we really need you right now.

With Gratitude,



Sarah Nelson, CEO



Empty shelves at the Food Bank

YMCR Expansion

“Often the calls that are most effective for the client are most gratifying for the counselor, too,” said Gabe Bullock, CommUnity’s newest addition to the Youth Mobile Crisis Response (YMCR) team. “Recently, I went to a school to see a student who’d been having emotional outbursts that often involved violence against staff. When school staff had tried working with this student, the student had responded with this same pattern of threats and acts of violence.”

The YMCR team responded to the scene, and provided emotional support for the student. Gabe went on to say “I was able to provide the student a confidential space separate from school staff. The student disclosed a complex situation with their parents, and that they didn’t trust school staff not to prioritize their parents’ needs... In this case, I’d recommended putting more control in the student’s hands over their care. While following up with the family, we learned that after our initial contact, the parents had given the student several choices for their care and that the student had ended up choosing a therapist, and is now in therapy. I still feel over the moon at this outcome, and honored I could be part of the process.”

Gabe is CommUnity’s first-ever Youth Mobile Crisis Counselor. He joined Parth Patel, Youth Mobile Crisis Coordinator, in January of this year. Parth took on his role in January of 2022, and in his first year he has made meaningful connections with not only local students, but parents and school staff, as well. “School and home calls have more than doubled in the last year as more community members are learning about this free, rapid resource,” said Parth. As calls increased, it became clear that the Youth Mobile Crisis team had to expand to fit the need.

Gabe put it best when he said “Before I joined the team, Parth was being pulled into schools all over. The more he responded, the more calls we got.” Parth was so effective, and this service was so needed in our community that we quickly outgrew the single-person team we launched last year. “The need for mental health support is massive in Iowa, and we continue to get overlapping calls from schools in the area. Until we have so many counselors that we get bored at our desks, we’ll keep expanding. We also see a disproportionately high percentage of LGBTQIA+ students. As the rights of

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I’m looking forward to the team expanding. Our service provides efficient, effective care. Our person power is always growing, but so is the need for mental health care.

Gabe Bullock, Youth Mobile Crisis Counselor

certain students continue to be debated on a political stage, our need for more counselors will grow.”

YMCR provides youth-centered emotional support for both students and their families. Parth and Gabe respond directly to schools and approach each call with empathy, understanding, and a lot of training. Currently, the program serves 11 school districts, and even a few private schools.

In addition to responding to calls and building relationships with school districts, Parth has led several Question, Persuade, Refer trainings (QPR) & LivingWorks Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) to older students and school staff. “I’ve helped facilitate two QPR trainings for some high school students who are passionate about mental health awareness and suicide prevention. I hope that local schools continue to reach out to have their staff trained in both of these,” he said. Both QPR and ASIST are great for anyone who “wants to learn some skills that’ll help them be more prepared to support someone when they are showing signs of mental health crisis.”

By expanding the program, we hope Parth will be able to spend much needed time providing these community trainings and building relationships in our area, allowing us all to be more equipped to jump in when a crisis situation arises.

Gabe seems to be settling into his new role at CommUnity quite nicely. Parth told us “I’m looking forward to seeing Gabe continue to flourish in this role. He’s been such a

team player and shows up to work ready to serve the community each and every day!”

Parth and Gabe would like to leave our Spring Newsletter readers with the following thoughts:

“You are more than your thoughts and you are more than your current emotions. Reaching out for help can be really hard, however, please know that you do not have to suffer alone. We see each human as worthy of nonjudgmental crisis support, and we are always here for you every single day, 24/7 <3”

-Parth Patel

“If you’re having trouble dealing with something, it may help to talk to someone. 988 counselors are a great resource, but if you want someone in-person, we’re here. It doesn’t matter what the crisis is: if you’re struggling, it couldn’t hurt to call.”

-Gabe Bullock

To read the full interview with Parth & Gabe, head to builtbycommunity.org/ymcrexpansion.



Parth Patel & Gabe Bullock

Bridging the Gap

In March our Financial support team was able to help a local family of six avoid eviction by providing them with a rent assist. The family was not eligible for other community programs due to a parent’s student status. Our programs are able to bridge the gap in services for those that do not qualify for other local programs. We are able to act as a support of last resort, if you will, when other amazing organizations are unable to assist with individualized needs.

Additionally, we’re here to bridge the gap of seasonal support. Just when spring seemed to be on the horizon, Iowa winter struck again in March, and we saw an immediate increase in the need for Financial Support. Our team worked swiftly to schedule appointments and fill out paperwork to help local families get the support they need.

We’re so proud of our Food Bank and Financial Support teams for providing individualized support to our clients when and where they need it most. However, financial and in-kind donations are down in both programs this year due to the current economic climate. This means that while we are doing the best we can with what we have, we strive to provide a higher level of support to our neighbors in crisis.

Did you know that a standard metal shopping cart filled with groceries weighs about 200 lbs?

Many of us can fill (and eat) a cart like this every single week, especially those of us with kiddos at home.

Did you know that in February we were able to send 38 lbs. of food home per individual per visit in February? That’s less than a quarter of a full shopping cart for the week. While this is 16 lbs. higher than the average for December 2022, we want to do better. However, with the number of visits increasing and donations decreasing, we’re struggling to provide the level of support our neighbors need.





While our awesome team is able to provide individualized support to our neighbors in crisis, the resources with which we’re able to do so are limited. When our neighbors thrive, our community thrives. By pulling together to provide food and financial support for our neighbors, we all benefit.



1121 S. Gilbert Court
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Crisis Line: 988
Mobile Crisis: 1-855-581-8111
Food Bank: 319-351-0128
Business Line: 319-351-2726

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12
APRIL



**BENEFIT
CONCERT**

5 - 9 PM
WILDWOOD SALOON
4919 WALLEYE DR. SE, IOWA CITY

BABY SHOWER



Over 200 families rely on CommUnity for diapers each week. Help us collect baby items through the month of April!

builtbycommunity.org/shower