



SPRING NEWSLETTER

The Real Value of Connection

Our neighbors need your help to keep their children fed. Nearly 10,000 of our neighbors in Johnson County receive food assistance from CommUnity Food Bank each month. Given recent changes to Iowa legislation, we expect that number to skyrocket in the over summer break.

The Food Bank is already unable to meet the demand for food assistance in Johnson County.

With the current food purchasing budget of \$25,000 per month, we are only able to provide 39 lbs. of food to nearly 200 households each day. To put this into context, a full grocery cart weighs an average of 200 lbs. This is not sufficient for a family for a whole week. We are striving to increase the amount, quality, and nutritional value of food on our shelves. In order to meet the food needs of Johnson County, monthly funding for the Food Bank needs to increase by 60%.

With a total food purchasing budget of \$40,000 per month, the Food Bank would be able to provide more high quality food to our neighbors facing hunger. Our neighbors and their children need your help to bridge the \$15,000 per month gap and keep food on the table.

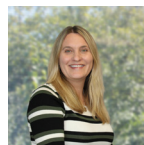
In December, the state of Iowa opted out of the federal summer meal program for low-income children. This program provides children who are already eligible for free or reduced-price school meals with a \$40 per

month EBT card to purchase food when school is not in session. The state criticized the program for not having a strong nutritional focus.

Restricting access to food does not help those in need eat healthier. It only makes it more difficult to eat at all. CommUnity Food Bank is just one of many Iowa food pantries struggling to meet the rising need right now. As we approach summer break, we expect to see many more families with school-age children depending on the Food Bank for their groceries each week.

Without additional funding, families facing hunger will have access to less food than necessary of lesser quality. Some of our neighbors will fall through the cracks completely, amplifying their crisis. Without the support of individuals like you, our neighbors who receive support will not receive enough support to break the cycle of crisis.

Children facing hunger in Johnson county need your help to bridge the gap this summer. Please consider donating \$39 this spring to provide one family with one week of groceries this summer. When our neighbors thrive, our community thrives.



Sarah J. Nelson

Sarah Nelson, CEO

Cops, Community, and Connection

“In my mind, one’s enough. If you get one person connected and they get things straightened out and they’ve got support and they get self-sufficient. Wow! I mean, shouldn’t that be enough?” says Coralville Police Chief Kron of the addition of a Mental Health/Law Enforcement Liaison in their department.

CommUnity’s Communications Manager recently had the opportunity to sit down with Chief Kron of Coralville and Chief Liston of Iowa City Police Department to check in on the growth of the Mental Health/Law Enforcement Liaison program through CommUnity’s Crisis Response Services. This unique program embeds mental health counselors in seven local law enforcement agencies, Iowa City Police Department, Coralville Police Department, Johnson County Sheriff’s Office, North Liberty Police Department, Iowa County Sheriff’s Office, Williamsburg Police Department, and Marengo Police Department. The liaisons work within law enforcement agencies and respond along with officers on calls that involve a mental health component.

The biggest success both Chief Kron and Chief Liston have noticed is a decrease in repeat calls to the same individuals due to follow up contacts made by the liaisons. The decrease in repeat calls saves law enforcement officers time and frees up resources for other calls. But the time savings is second to the level of care being provided. As Chief Liston says, “More so than us freeing up resources, I think the bigger benefit is just us providing better service to the people in need.”

Chief Kron agrees, and mentions “The fact that it saves us a bunch of time and a bunch of repeat calls. That’s a side benefit, not *the* benefit. I think sometimes that gets lost, and we want to measure time. We want counts and we want numbers and what we want, it’s anecdotal. The measure is anecdotal...The real value is how many people get connected with a service and get things straightened out that they need.”

Joachim “Joah” Seelos was the first-ever Mental Health/Law Enforcement Liaison, hired by CommUnity in 2021 to assist the Iowa City Police Department. Since then, Kaitie Wade has joined the Iowa City Police Department, Kieonna Pope has joined the Coralville Police Department, North Liberty Police Department and the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office, and Heather Wells has joined the Marengo and Williamsburg Police Departments and the Iowa County Sheriff’s Office. Chief Liston says he hopes even more liaisons could be added in the next few years. “I’ve been a police officer for over 25 years and the number of people having some sort of mental health crisis is not getting less... The need is not going away. It’s only increasing.”

He goes on to say, “I think the community should be very



Iowa City Police Chief Liston and Kaitie Wade (Mental Health/Law Enforcement Liaison)

proud of the services that are being provided and how we do work well together. And that’s important because I think some people think that we’re competing interests and we are not. We are not competing interests. We’re working towards the same goal. We both want the same thing.”

In 2023, CommUnity’s Mental Health/Law Enforcement Liaisons responded to 538 mental health related calls and follow up referrals. After the initial call, liaisons

follow up with the client to check on their progress, connect them with local resources, and even help with things like making doctor appointments or accessing food assistance programs. “People don’t do this stuff intentionally.” says Chief Kron. “People don’t become homeless intentionally. People aren’t hungry intentionally. And just kind of trying to get them connected is what we’re supposed to be doing out here.” When appropriate, clients are referred to other CommUnity programs such as the Food Bank, Financial Support, or Mobile Crisis Response. By directing clients to appropriate resources, they receive the care they need in a timely manner, hopefully lifting the client up and interrupting the cycle of crisis.

When asked what one thing he would like the whole community to know about this program, Chief Liston says, “I know it sounds kind of cheesy, but they’re here to help. They want to get the people the services that they most need to help them through whatever crisis they’re

in. And they’re not worried about what charges someone has or what their immigration status is. They’re there to get them the mental health help that they need.”

Chief Kron emphasized that “The most important part is, are we getting people connected? Are we making it better? What’s the outcome for them? And I think that we can point to people that have had a better outcome than they ever would have had if it was just us... When you make progress, you don’t want to give up. We’ve made it better, so let’s not give that up.”

If you or a loved one is feeling stressed, anxious, depressed, experiencing thoughts of suicide, or could just use someone to talk to, please don’t hesitate to reach out. While CommUnity’s Mental Health/Law Enforcement Liaisons are available through law enforcement agencies, but anyone can reach out to Mobile Crisis to receive support. Mobile crisis counselors are available 24/7/365 and can be dispatched to any location in Johnson or Iowa County. This service is completely free and confidential. We’re here to help.

To have counselors dispatched to your location, call Your Life Iowa at 855-581-8111 and ask for mobile crisis.

Supporting Our Neighbors

HealingPrairieFarm, a collaboration between CommUnity and United Action for Youth (UAY), welcomed four youth on March 4. This program follows the care farm model, which allows clients in crisis to stabilize and receive care in a therapeutic farm setting.

During their stay, youth in crisis will have the opportunity to participate in individual and family counseling, music therapy, art therapy, and assist with caring for the animals and gardens. The home-like setting of the property provides a therapeutic environment.

CommUnity purchased the property outside of Iowa City in August 2023. This program is made possible by funding from the Johnson County Board of Supervisors, Mental Health/Disability Services of the East Central Region, grants, and individual contributions. Following extensive renovations to two farmhouses, we are so excited to finally open our doors and begin providing developmentally appropriate care to youth in crisis.





While renovations and construction work are behind

us, we will need tremendous ongoing support from the community to sustain this program. Learn more about the farm and how you can become a Friend of the Farm on our website.



Adrienne Korbakes (COO) and Pride the horse



-  @builtbycommunity
-  @builtxcommunity
-  @builtbycommunity
-  @builtbycommunity

1121 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

builtbycommunity.org



BABY SHOWER

THIS APRIL



**DIAPERS, FORMULA, WIPES, OH MY!
DONATE BABY ITEMS TO THE FOOD
BANK THIS APRIL!**

BACKPOCKET
• BREWING •
CORALVILLE, IOWA

BEND & BRUNCH



**PERIOD POVERTY
AWARENESS &
PRODUCT DRIVE**

Sunday, May 19
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.