



# WINTER NEWSLETTER

## Giving Back is Better than Peanut M&M's

LPL Financial volunteers sort Scouting for Food drive donations. Thank you to those who helped with dozens of community-led drives and advocated for our neighbors during the delay in SNAP disbursement in November 2025.

Over the past few months, our community has shown up in full force to protect their neighbors. Because of your generosity and belief in our mission, our organization has been able to adapt, respond, and grow where needs were greatest.

This tremendous support has had a very real, tangible impact on our neighbors facing crisis. Thanks to increased donations, volunteer hours, and community partnerships, the food pantry was able to increase the amount of food families receive at each weekly visit from 37 pounds to nearly 50 pounds. While our ultimate goal remains 100 pounds per household, this increase means fuller bellies, fewer hard choices, and greater stability for families navigating rising costs and ongoing uncertainty. It also helped to chip away at our housing assistance waiting list, which had grown to nearly 300 households during the height of recent challenges. Nearly half of those families have since received assistance and been moved off that list.

Your support allowed our services to flex in real time. When needs surged, you helped us meet them. When systems strained, you helped us hold the line. And when

opportunities arose to do more, you stepped forward with confidence.

As grateful as we are, we also know the road ahead will continue to bring challenges. Just a few weeks ago, an estimated \$2 billion cut to over 2,800 mental health and substance use grants nationwide threatened to undermine essential care, a decision that was thankfully reversed the very next day. It is difficult to keep a steady pace when hurdles seem to appear and disappear without notice. Moments like these remind us how fragile support systems can be, and how vital grassroots efforts truly are.

Your continued involvement will be essential as we cross the next hurdles together. Thank you for standing with us, believing in our work, and helping our community move forward stronger than before.

In community,



Sarah Nelson, CEO

# Sweet on Volunteering

“I just have loved it every single year.” Kassy told our Communications & Development Coordinator, Kendall, in a recent interview.

“Love it as much as peanut M&M’s?” her husband, Steve, asked.

“Yes, more than peanut M&M’s.”

If you spend any time at the food pantry on a Thursday, chances are you have seen Kassy and Steve smiling, chatting, quietly helping, and making the space feel warmer just by being there.



Long-time volunteers, Steve and Kassy

For more than a decade, Kassy and Steve have been a familiar, steady presence at the food pantry. The couple has witnessed enormous change in the space itself, in the needs of our neighbors, and in their own lives. Yet their reason for showing up remains beautifully simple: it makes them happy.

Their volunteer journey began after Steve retired from his career as a school principal. When he realized the great novel he planned to write might never happen,

Kassy had a better idea: *let’s go volunteer!* For Kassy, who spent years juggling work and family, volunteering was something she had long hoped to return to when time finally opened up.

What they found was community. “The community of the food bank is so amazing,” Kassy shared. “You feel like a part of something.”

Over the years, they’ve seen it all. From the old, crowded pantry where neighbors squeezed into tight rooms with baskets, to today’s open, welcoming space with carts, seating, and room to move. That change, Steve noted,

has made a real difference in how people treat one another. Steve remembers watermelons causing joyful chaos, with neighbors so excited they practically climbed over him to get one. “This is what rock stars feel like!” he joked.

But beyond the funny moments are the ones that stay with you. Kassy has comforted neighbors who arrived embarrassed and in tears, gently reminding them they are welcome and cared for here. These moments, small and human, are why they keep coming back.

Their time on the front lines has also been deeply eye-opening. “Once you work here, you realize the only difference between the volunteers and the clients is money,” Steve reflected. Life circumstances, often completely out of someone’s control, can shift everything. Kassy echoed this, sharing how meaningful it has been to recognize familiar faces week after week and truly know people and their stories.

Even after Steve’s recovery from cancer, they chose to come back - doing what they can, where they can. Kassy

greeted neighbors at the front desk. Steve works behind the scenes making sure food gets where it needs to go. Together, they offer kindness, laughter, and consistency, returning together each week.

Why? “Hey, it makes me happy, that’s all,” Steve said simply. Kassy added, “It really does, it makes us happy...

When I was younger, that’s what I wanted to do, but I just didn’t have time to do it.”

Their message to anyone considering volunteering is to not worry about stepping out of your comfort zone. You’ll gain far more than you give, and you’ll be part of something vital to our community.

## A Season of Care and Community



with loved ones. We are filled with deep gratitude for everyone who made Project Holiday 2025 possible.

During the week of Project Holiday distribution, CommUnity Food Bank served a total of 1,154 households through our pantry, grocery delivery program, and Mobile Pantry sites. Of those households, 82% received a Project Holiday meal, complete with the groceries needed to prepare a traditional holiday dinner at home. For families facing food insecurity, this meant more

Thanks to the generosity of our donors and the dedication of our volunteers, thousands of our neighbors were able to experience something many of us hold dear: the comfort of a warm holiday meal shared

than just nourishment, it meant dignity, choice, and the ability to take part in a meaningful holiday tradition. Sharing a meal with family and friends is a privilege that can be easily overlooked. For many of our neighbors, financial strain, rising costs, and unexpected crises make that experience uncertain or out of reach. Project Holiday exists to help bridge that gap, ensuring that more families can gather around a table and slow down together during a season that can otherwise be isolating or stressful.

This impact would not be possible without you. Our volunteers showed up in the cold, lifted heavy boxes, packed groceries, made deliveries, and greeted neighbors with kindness and respect. Our donors gave generously, turning dollars into meals and hope.

Together, you made holiday wishes come true in a very real and tangible way.



Food pantry staff and volunteers pose on the first day of Project Holiday distribution.

Thanks to our Project Holiday Sponsors!



ImOn





Casey’s



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

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