



SPRING NEWSLETTER

Investing in Our Neighborhood

When the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped how we served our community, we moved CommUnity Food Bank into a larger space at Pepperwood Plaza, intended as a temporary solution. Over the past six years, that “temporary” space has grown into something much more: a vibrant hub where neighbors find support every day. Now, we’re ready to take the next step.

After years of thoughtful planning and conversation, we’re excited to launch a multi-phase renovation of our food pantry beginning with Phase One: Market Makeover. This first phase marks a meaningful shift in how our space looks, feels, and functions for the people we serve.

With funding generously provided by Johnson County, we’ll begin transforming our current warehouse-style pantry into a welcoming, market-style environment. Imagine a space that feels less like a warehouse and more like a neighborhood grocery store. This shift prioritizes dignity, choice, and ease of access. This phase will allow

us to invest in essential equipment and fixtures that better support a client-centered experience.

This work wouldn’t be possible without collaboration. We’re deeply grateful to Johnson County for helping bring phase one of this vision to life, and to Better Together 2030 for convening partners like Table to Table, United Action for Youth (UAY), and 4C’s Community Coordinated Childcare for upcoming phases. Together, we’re building something stronger than any one organization could alone.

There’s more ahead. As this transformation unfolds, we’ll continue working to create a space that truly reflects the strength and dignity of our community. Sometimes investing in our neighbors looks like investing in our neighborhood. This improved space will make a real difference in the comfort of our neighbors who are bravely seeking help for their families.

Stay tuned! We can’t wait to share what’s next.

Shaping Engagement

By Drew Martel, LISW, CADC, Chief Clinical Officer

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead

At CommUnity, we see people on some of their hardest days: late at night, in moments of uncertainty, after something has already gone wrong, or just before it might.

And what becomes very clear, very quickly, is this: The systems people rely on in those moments didn’t appear by accident. They were built, or not built, through policy decisions, funding priorities, and community engagement.

Policy is the difference between a call being answered quickly or waiting on hold, a mobile crisis team being available or not, a youth having a safe place to go for stabilization or cycling through emergency departments, a family leaving the hospital with a plan or with uncertainty.

Over the past year in Iowa, we’ve seen significant changes in how mental health services are structured and funded. The transition to a new district-based system, shifts in how services are accessed, and evolving expectations around programs have all had real impacts. Some of these changes hold promise. Others have created confusion for providers and for the people we serve.

One of the biggest challenges right now isn’t a single policy decision, it’s the cumulative effect of many small ones.

When systems become harder to understand people fall through the cracks, providers spend more time navigating systems than helping people, critical services become underutilized, not because they aren’t needed, but because they’re harder to access. When someone reaches out, there isn’t room for confusion. It’s easy to assume that these decisions are made somewhere

far away, by people we’ll never meet. But in Iowa, that’s often not true. Our systems are shaped by local partnerships, state-level decisions, and community voices (or the absence of them).

But engagement makes a difference. When communities advocate, programs are sustained. When providers share what’s working (and what isn’t), systems improve. When individuals speak up about their experiences, it shapes how services evolve.

And just as importantly, when engagement doesn’t happen, decisions still get made.

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The hopeful part is that this system is still being shaped. Which means it’s still possible to influence it.

At CommUnity, we remain committed to showing up for individuals and families in crisis and sharing what we’re seeing, honestly and constructively. And we’ve learned that the strongest systems are not built solely through policy. They are built by people continuing to care about how things work.

Stay connected to what’s happening in your community. Pay attention to how systems are changing. Ask questions when things don’t make sense. Share your experiences, especially if you’ve needed support.

You don’t need to be an expert in policy to make a difference. You just need to stay engaged.



CommUnity Peer Support Specialist, Kimmie Andresen-Reed, in action

Creating Hope Together

When someone is struggling, the hardest step is often the first one: reaching out. That’s where Peer Support makes a difference. This new service through Mobile Crisis Response connects individuals with trained peer counselors who have lived experience and a deep understanding of what it means to navigate mental health challenges. Rather than facing difficult moments alone, individuals are paired with someone who can walk alongside them, offering encouragement, practical help, and steady support.

As Peer Support Specialist, Kimmie Andresen-Reed assists with real-life needs that can feel overwhelming in times of stress. She can help schedule appointments, attend doctor visits for added support, and guide individuals through available resources.

The goal is to make sure no one has to navigate recovery or crisis alone. “Peer support involves learning and

collaboration where we are both peers,” says Kimmie. “I don’t bring you hope, we create it together.”

Peer Support is also closely connected to school communities. Kimmie’s role focuses on bridging gaps between students, families, and mental health resources.

When challenges arise, especially in school settings, timely and compassionate intervention can make all the difference. The team works in partnership with educators and families to prioritize student well-being while minimizing disruptions to learning.

But this support isn’t limited to schools. A crisis can happen anywhere, at any time. That’s why Mobile Crisis counselors are available throughout Johnson and Iowa counties, with teams able to meet individuals where they are within about 30 minutes of the initial call.



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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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Keep your eye on the ball!

More details coming soon...



-  Complete local adventures
-  Earn prizes like icecream & baseball tickets
-  Raise hunger awareness & engage with our community!