



# WA FER

## FOOD PANTRY

### Director's Message

### WA FER NEWSLETTER | Spring 2020

When I originally started writing my update we were on the cusp of learning the extent COVID-19 would have. I put my projects on hold to work with staff to determine next steps for the pantry. The speed this situation changes is head spinning and uncertain at times. What isn't uncertain is the commitment of the board and staff to feed people. Our patrons face uncertainty each day and we knew that WA FER couldn't be an uncertainty. We haven't stepped back from service. In fact, each day we assess the situation to determine our steps forward to meet emerging needs. Messaging is consistent and as detailed as possible to make staff, volunteers, and patrons feel as safe as possible; we follow directives from government and health officials, encourage handwashing, offer alternative opportunities to at risk patrons, and take it day by day.

Taking life day by day is what people served by WA FER are faced with. Periodically, our patrons give me a small glimpse into their life - homelessness, disability, joblessness, caring for loved ones, health issues, and more. I am grateful people feel WA FER is a safe place to share personal details. Almost daily I witness our wonderful Client Coordinators, Laura and Diane, serve on the frontline with grace and compassion and I see relationships grow between volunteers and patrons. Patrons plan their day around a 5 minute interaction with someone who used to be a stranger, but is now a trusted confidant. These moments are beautiful! When our lives return to some form of "normal", will you have some free time on your hands? Do you want to be a part of life changing community work? If yes, then WA FER is your place! One hour, one day a month, one day a week, etc, we will take any or all of it! Call or email to schedule. You can read about some of our rockstar volunteers in the *Annual Report*, found on the website under "About Us". The Annual Report is 2019 in review; milestones, financial information, service statistics, patron stories, donors, and more. I encourage you to take 10 minutes to scan through it.

Since the last newsletter we have had some personnel changes. This is always a challenge as new staff are trained, develop a new normal, and get everyone moving in the same direction. In early February we welcomed a new and highly energetic Mobile Pantry Manager, Sanya. Read about her on page 3. Late February we welcomed two new drivers, Dean and Terry, and wished George a "happy retirement". In early April, we welcomed another Terry to help fill gaps when staff need time off. I am grateful these great people see the benefit WA FER provides to people in need and want to join our team. These folks join a small group of hunger fighters who work hard to ensure our friends and neighbors are taken care of. I am so very proud of the staff for their selfless service, loyalty, drive to continually improve, support for one another, and so much more!

It is possible for this unprecedented situation to overshadow the **many** wonderful things that continue to happen at WA FER. Many step up and partner in the missions work, not just now, but all year long. A few examples are: our friends at Citizen State Bank who offer WE CARE charitable account benefits which allows members to designate funds to support WA FER, Rotary Lights volunteers and board members who use the holiday display to encourage attendees to support local food pantries, home gardeners who share their bounty so others can enjoy and benefit from locally grown produce, and businesses such as Summit Fire Protection who keep fire extinguishers serviced and Kwik Trip Distribution Center who provide cooler/freezer space allowing us to maximize donations of surplus foods, all at no charge.

Are you in a position to bless others with your resources? If so, would you consider blessing WA FER? (See page 3 Updates) For every \$1 donated we provide 4 meals to people who struggle to put a meal or even enough food on the table. However, together we make a difference for so many people and ensure that not one person in our local communities goes hungry. Thank you for your ongoing, faithful, and generous support of the 1500 families served each month.

~Erin Waldhart, Executive Director



## How we are working to reduce risks and still serve the public



Instead of the traditional “walk through” system for the once monthly Saturday food giveaway, patrons drove thru and had a food package placed in their car. A few people needed walk up service but practiced safe distancing.



Prepacked boxes based on household size reduce person to person contact and the time spent in line.



Evening Manager, Ben, designating spots to wait in line based on social distancing guidelines.



A check-in table creates a safe barrier between patrons and staff as well as an area to post helpful information.



Client Coordinator, Diane, uses clean hands and procedures for her safety and the patrons. Diane packs the cart, hands it off to the patron, sanitizes the cart when returned, changes gloves often, and washes hands frequently.



After the CDC and La Crosse County Health Department recommended all essential workers wear masks, volunteers and staff with patron contact were requested to use one. Masks are available to any other staff or volunteers wishing to use them.

## Common FAQ's Answered

**What does WAVER stand for?** WAVER was originally a joint project between the Roncalli Newman Center and the UW-L Lutheran Campus Ministries. From a table to a closet, the project grew quickly and was moved to St Paul's Lutheran Church on West Avenue. There the project became a non-profit, The **West Avenue Food Emergency Resource**. When it was moved to the current location on Causeway Blvd the long name was changed and has been known as WAVER Food Pantry since then.

**Where does your funding come from?** Funding comes from a variety of sources; local and national foundations, program funding by Great Rivers United Way, individual donors, business/service club/church/organization/etc donations, some government programs, and many more.

**Where do you get your food?** We have two different categories of food—shelf stable and fresh. Shelf stable foods are made up of government commodities, community donations, and purchased product. Fresh items (meat, produce, dairy, bakery) come from retail/distribution partners and our cost for this is in the form of vehicle and staff expenses to pick up donations. Last year we distributed 1.6 million pounds (or 1.4 million meals) for ~.25 per meal. That is awesome bang per buck!



## A Message From The New Mobile Pantry Manager



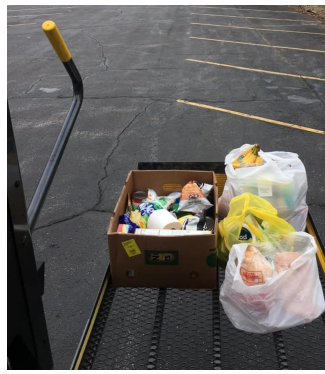
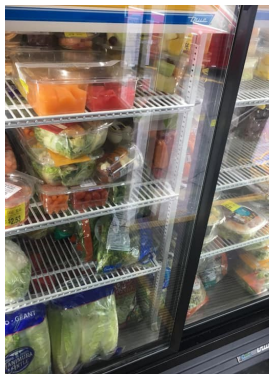
My name is Sanya Frescura, the new Mobile Pantry Manager at WAVER Food Pantry. I am very excited to start this journey at WAVER, especially with the Mobile Pantry.

I migrated here from West Allis, WI to pursue a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. I graduated in May 2019 and have been blessed to call La Crosse my home for the past five years. I have consistently worked within the community, but always felt a need to become more involved with and serve the wonderful community I am a part of. Throughout my time in La Crosse, the experiences I have gained from college, and my personal life, I discovered a passion to work for the community rather than within. When I saw the position open at WAVER, I knew it would be a great fit. This job will provide me the opportunity to delve into my passions, expand program development skills, and serve the public. I am ecstatic to

expand the Mobile Pantry into more neighborhoods within La Crosse County to reach the people who are most in need. As much as I love to see our community members gain the resources they need at current sites, I am also eager to provide and seek out areas that are still in need of assistance.

If you should have any questions about the Mobile Pantry services, monthly stops, how you can help, would like a tour of the vehicle, or anything else, please don't hesitate to reach out!

Additionally, to keep the Mobile Pantry on the road during the pandemic I have altered the way service is provided. Like the regular pantry we now offer pre-packed boxes (see picture 1) instead of inviting patrons to board and choose their own foods. Patrons register for a food package, volunteers pack the perishable items (dairy, produce, meat, and break—see pictures 2 & 3), and all of it is placed on the outside lift (see picture 4). Communication occurs through the closed mobile pantry doors or at the lift.



## Newsworthy Updates

1. In February, WAVER began partnering with Hilltopper Refuse and Recycling to implement an organic recycling program. Past prime food once bound for the landfill now goes through a recycling process turning it into compost to feed the soil. Environmentally friendly and will save ~\$70 monthly!
2. Late March, two pieces of information was learned. One, the Letter Carriers Union announced postponement (due to COVID-19) of their national food drive held the 2nd Saturday each May. While prudent, this largest one-day event typically yields a whopping 6-8 week supply of food. Two, United Way Campaign and allocations were released. Campaign support was down, impacting agency funding. WAVER's impact is ~25% decreased funding compared to previous years (~\$20,000 annually for 2 years).
3. The Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse and WAVER teamed up to apply for and receive an in-kind donation of menstrual cups. The benefits to using this product are many, but most notably are eco-friendly and cost savings of \$12-20 monthly for one ~\$15 purchase that can last <10 years.

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## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

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WAFER is a United Way Partner Agency

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## Our Mission:

Responding to God's love, WAFER provides food and works to eliminate hunger.

# How You Can Help Now

**VOLUNTEER | DONATE FOOD | DONATE ONLINE**

Call, click or visit WAFER to volunteer and donate food.

Donate online at [www.waferlacrosse.org](http://www.waferlacrosse.org) and  
use the PayPal link .

**If you would like to write a check to donate,  
please use the envelope enclosed.**

# Thank you!