



Spring 2021

Board President Taylor Haley: “Feeding People is Complex”

Feeding hungry people sounds simple enough: Receive donated food. Give it to people. After serving many years on the board of WAHER Food Pantry, I have discovered that there is nothing easy about it.

WAHER goes the extra mile to provide individuals and families with a balanced food package, rather than just what we have on the shelf. Food packages include canned goods such as vegetables, fruit, peanut butter, cereal and pasta, as well as bakery items, dairy products, meat, fresh produce, and hygiene items. Food packages are based on household size.

Providing a diversity of food is our commitment to promote community health, but it is a challenge. We are dependent on donations from the community and local businesses, what we receive in government commodities, and stretching our dollars as far as they can go to purchase the food items in short supply.

The food pantry situation can be feast or famine. We purchase items in bulk when we can, to get the best price. When we receive the equivalent of two months of commodities in one fell swoop we run out of space and have to find alternate sources of USDA approved dry and/or cold storage. Other times, we run desperately low on some of our staples.

And that’s just food procurement and storage. There is also our commitment of working hard to meet the diversity of needs, ethnic and dietary, that patrons have and offer programs like the Nutrition Education and Tools Project to equip participants with resources to make healthier choices. Read more about this on page 3 - *Shifting “Course”*.

For some folks, transportation to WAHER is a barrier and next to impossible -- thus we developed our mobile food pantry, which is like a grocery store on wheels. Before COVID, patrons entered the mobile pantry and used a mini-cart to shop for canned goods, fresh produce, frozen meat and dairy products. Everyone loves being able to pick out items they enjoy.

I remember hearing from a volunteer who went to a person’s house and there was not one food item in their cupboards or refrigerator. We can’t watch that happen in our community. Through our Senior Share program, we deliver food packages to seniors who can’t get to WAHER or a mobile pantry site.



We continue to use equipment - like our van, truck, forklift and refrigeration units - to pick up food from various locations around the community and store it appropriately. All of this takes place in a building that we have out-grown, so we continue to search for a new facility to accommodate all that we do and to serve people better.

Yes, getting food to people is complex -- but all of this work is worth it when we are able to feed hungry people and families. WAHER is dependent upon and very grateful for the generosity of the people in our area, like you and our many valuable partnerships such as United Way, retailers, and our local Feeding America Food Bank Channel One in Rochester!

In this issue.....

Welcoming New Board Members
Staff Retirement
Nutrition Education

A Note From The Executive Director

The New Year brought with it what feels like the ease of our new “normal”. Staff and volunteers look forward to the day we welcome patrons back in the pantry to choose their own foods. For now, we continue to uphold the same practices we have since last spring to protect the health of staff, volunteers, and patrons. I had had many ask if we will continue to offer curbside pick up once the building reopens, because it really is convenient especially for people with limited mobility. No decisions have been made yet.

Over the last few months we have continued to grow programs and services; now offering weekly food packages versus two monthly since last May, new Mobile Pantry sites (Holmen Area Community Center and La Crosse School’s rotation), a one-time meat distribution event, and slowly easing back into community events like the Recycling Fair. The year is nearly half over, but you can find a recap of 2020 in the Annual Report on WAFER’s website under the “Resources” tab.



The winter months increased the difficulty of our work. Two specific areas I would like to share are volunteerism and partners. First, changing the logistics for the once monthly Saturday food distribution event, from walk-thru to drive-thru, made it possible to continue offering this additional food package. This change allowed people to safely volunteer outside or spread out inside the building. Looking back on each event, what stands out are the self-sacrificing volunteers. They are people who want to make sure their community members have food to eat regardless of risk to self. Second, if it weren’t for our partners at Neighbor for Neighbor Food Pantry in Tomah there would have been days when patrons would have received a fraction of the fresh produce they are accustomed to due to decreased excess in winter. Our need was great. We made a simple phone call to our friends and they offered to share whatever they had.

We are so grateful for partnerships with food pantries to share surplus between all of us, our Feeding America Food Bank, Channel One in Rochester, and **YOU!** Partnerships make collective impact greater and I am so proud of that!

In Service, *Erin Wadsworth*

Long-time Warehouse Manager Retires



In April 2009, Eric Johnson began volunteering for WAFER. Just two months later he was hired as Evening Manager. Eric took advantage of opportunities to learn new roles, moving up to Driver and then Warehouse Manager. Like many roles in the non-profit sector, Eric’s responsibilities were too many to list. He was the driving force in the warehouse; directing volunteers and staff, ensuring donations were picked up and properly stored, working with partners and donors, managing inventory, maintaining vehicles, and more. As WAFER grew, Eric provided stability and leadership. Yet, his ability to adapt to more equipment, vehicles, donors, and nearly 1 million more pounds than he began with made him an invaluable resource.

Eric wasn’t always “Mr. Serious”. In fact, he made our atmosphere fun and accepting of everyone. Eric could often be heard singing or humming a tune, offering a celebratory signature dance for any occasion big or small, willing to offer a smile for any picture opportunity, and put on any silly hat the staff could find. For these reasons and more, Eric’s presence is greatly missed. However, if anyone has earned retirement, it is him. Eric has given all of himself in lifelong service and dedication to others.



Meet WAFER's Newest Board Members



Brent Drenckhahn began volunteering at WAFER in 2016, stocking shelves on Thursday evenings after work. Soon after, Brent began helping with the once monthly Saturday Food Fair.

Brent has lived in Holmen for the past 3 years and prior to that in the Caledonia, MN area for 20 years. Brent has two children, Maria and Adam, "who are both amazing adults with successful careers."

Brent brings to WAFER experience as a Project Manager for Dairyland Power Cooperative, where he has worked for 37 years.

In his spare time, Brent enjoys trap shooting, hiking, kayaking, attending outdoor music festivals, and volunteering. "Working with WAFER has been very rewarding, I feel honored to have been asked to be on the Board of Directors and look forward to helping WAFER continue to grow into the future."



Madalene Buelow moved from Madison and arrived in La Crosse with her family 23 years ago, making their home on French Island. Her husband, Kevin, took a job with Franciscan Skemp, their two daughters attended Logan Middle and High School, and she began working as an Administrative Assistant for the Franciscan Skemp Foundation. Madalene then moved into a Development Director position (fund- and friend-raiser) for the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration for the next 13 years.

Madalene and her husband recently retired, and are looking forward to volunteering in the community. "I am really excited to serve as a board member for WAFER and volunteer as well!" Madalene brings a wealth of development knowledge to the board as well as a plethora of volunteer experiences such as St. Clare Health Mission, YWCA, La Crosse Promise, and the Women's Fund.

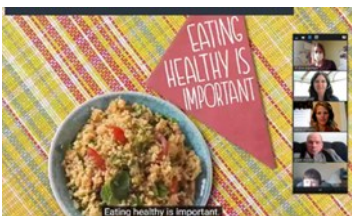
Shifting "Course" on Nutrition Education

For the past 6 years the *Nutrition Education and Tools Project* has been an important factor in "working to eliminate hunger", part of WAFER's mission. This project focuses on skills such as food preparation and nutrition knowledge to increase produce consumption, and then provide participants tools to implement new skills at home. Thanks to community partners - UW Extension FoodWise Nutrition Educators, Viterbo Dietetic Students, Gunderson and Mayo Health Systems, and UW-L Chartwell Chefs - a wide variety of classes have been offered. But, Nutrition Education became a casualty of COVID.

With news stories circling about rising food prices and shortages at the grocery store, it was the perfect time to use the resources at hand. August 2020, the reality that this situation would be long term led FoodWise Educators and WAFER staff to begin talking about shifting "course" on nutrition education. Mary Hoeft-Leithold and Karie Johnson put their heads together to create a curriculum that could be delivered virtually. "Zoom classes have been a great way for WAFER customers to discover new ways to plan and prepare nutritious and low-cost foods in a way that helps participants stay safe and still connect with others." Mary Hoeft-Leithold



Their focus was a bit more back to basics; how best to use cost efficient foods, get the most for your money, and still eat healthy. "COVID left FoodWise with an abrupt inability to do face-to-face education.



As an educational institution that focuses on connecting individuals to resources, losing our audience left us feeling defeated and powerless to help our learners. Interacting virtually with our audience during this increased period of hardship allowed us to build relationships, be a trusted resource, and enable us to continue providing invaluable information on healthy eating, quick meals from the pantry, and food budgeting." Karie Johnson

These two are accomplishing their goal of connecting with WAFER's patrons and helping to create lasting change. And, it is evidenced by the glowing reviews they receive and the gratitude from their learners!

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WAFER is a Partner Agency with United Way and
Feeding America's Channel One Regional Food Bank.



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 and
use the PayPal link .

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

Thank you!