



WAHER

FOOD PANTRY

Director's Message

WAHER NEWSLETTER | Summer | 2019

Happy summer, my friends!

This year has been so odd. First came the severe and prolonged sub-temperatures of winter, then record setting flood days, and finally the bugs—gnats and mosquitoes to be specific! It is my opinion that Mother Nature ought to have given a pass on the rest of the year given winter's challenges. Environmental conditions pose even greater challenges for the population WAHER Food Pantry serves. I feel for the people that come in to the pantry covered in bug bites because if you can't afford food you probably can't afford bug spray either. Right? It is these little challenges most of us don't think about, the basic needs someone is likely to forgo when food sources are unstable. If people can't afford food then they probably can't afford _____ (fill in the blank) either. What are the things we take for granted? Toilet paper. Shampoo. Shelter. Razors. Air conditioning. Tampons. Heat. Ibuprofen for aches. Bandages for a cut. Sunscreen.

WAHER's clients clearly understand how food insecurity affects all other areas of life. In fact, according to the client survey conducted last year, 2 in 3 respondents reported having to choose between food or basic necessities. I recently received a letter from "Donna", a senior who utilizes the Mobile Food Pantry program. She shared her story and her struggles. She lives alone, receives no food share dollars, and living solely on social security since retirement has changed her life drastically. She spoke of the "blessing" that the Mobile Pantry has provided her. ***"The food that I receive helps so much—it truly makes a difference on whether I have enough to eat or not."*** The gifts you provide put food on the table for "Donna" and many other seniors like her.

The impact we have together doesn't just make a difference for seniors, but every other age as well. Services are and always have been provided at no charge to pantry patrons. Some patrons are in a position to volunteer, others are not, but in either case it is not required in exchange for any assistance. Recently, I overheard a heartfelt conversation between a mother and her child. The mother has been volunteering up to 3 days a week since the beginning of the year and has relied on WAHER for years to help meet their monthly food needs. The child grew bored with volunteer tasks and wanted to go home. The mother responded with, "I understand, but each month I take and take, all I can offer back is myself in return." Her gift of time certainly isn't expected, but it is wonderful to have such great and genuine help!

Thank you! For all the gifts of food or money you give, your gifts of service volunteering or offering your expertise, words of encouragement and support, for your faithfulness to the mission, and unending engagement in all that WAHER has going on. I hope that you take a few more minutes to catch up on what is new at WAHER and bits of what makes WAHER so great. Together we make a world of difference right here at home!

~Erin Waldhart, Executive Director



A few of the many ways the community supports WAFER

To provide nutritionally varied food packages and nearly 1.5 million meals annually, WAFER relies on generous donors. Food donations come from varying sources, everything between individuals and national retail partners. Every bit is appreciated, but there seems to be a buzz generated by pantry patrons and farm fresh goods. The push to “buy local” and “eat fresh” is not lost on WAFER’s patrons, but can oftentimes be prohibitive in cost and access.



WAFER staff received a call this spring from a farmer who has provided farm fresh goods for many years. The farmer had a new batch of chickens. Initially they typically produce irregular sized, small, or double yoked eggs. They are still every bit as tasty and nutritious as other eggs, they just don’t meet industry standards for retail. The farmer projected a one-time donation of ~1200 dozen eggs. In the end, the farmer delivered 4 loads of eggs totaling 3000 dozen. What about cartons for packaging?

There are few topics that grab the attention of WAFER’s supporters as much as egg donations and the need for cartons. The need was communicated to the community and the response was egg-cellent. A push at the end when we were 500 dozen short yielded 300 dozen more than what was needed. There was never a doubt that you would come through!

Speaking of generosity and community response, WAFER has been blessed many times over by the efforts of the Beer By Bike Brigade (BBBB) and the people who participate in activities which strengthen and support programs. The impact is huge and widely affects 1000’s of people locally. Just a few of the causes this group tackle are hunger, feminine hygiene, safe biking, and environmental consciousness. WAFER fits in the hunger and poverty consequences realm.

BBBB resources and opportunities have provided brand new pillows for pantry patrons, hygiene bags, diapers, and most recently baby formula. Early May, BBBB hosted a community bake sale to raise funds for 6 local organizations. Event helper Randi Pueschner (pictured right with her daughter, Rey, and just one of the many deliveries) chose to purchase baby formula for WAFER, a highly requested and rarely available item. More than \$4000 was raised during the 2 hours event providing \$713.25 to each organization or cause. BBBB organizers and supporters embody activism, truly seeing the many needs of fellow community members and choosing to act in great love to make a difference.



The second Saturday of each May is the annual National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive. This event is operated across the nation and led by local letter carriers who market the event through media outlets, delivery of postcard reminders, and by providing 100,000’s of bags locally to make donating that much easier. However, this past year was incredibly challenging when a bag sponsor was not secured. This challenge proved to be too hard to overcome and as a result those 100,000+ bags were not delivered. Consequently, WAFER experienced a nearly 50% reduction in donations just prior to the busy summer months. Each month, 1500 households depend on WAFER for a food package. Staff have estimated it will take \$35-\$40,000 to cover this loss above and beyond projected food costs for the year, but are determined to continue offering the services pantry patrons have come to rely on. Despite the challenges this deficit has created, there have also been several individuals or groups who are aware of this situation and have committed to helping such as River Bank and LHI.

The news we have to share isn’t all bad. In fact, one of the best services we implemented this spring was a result of being flooded with fresh product from retail partners and the government commodities program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program. To reduce waste and get the product into the hands of those that need it most, staff implemented the “partial package”. Except for the week when the household picks up the entire food package, patrons can return once weekly to pick up a “partial package” containing produce, bakery, and milk. Partial packages will continue as long as incoming product remains consistent. Since implementation the number of people returning for an additional full food package has decreased by 50% and hundreds of households are eating more produce!



A message from Channel One Food Bank

The thunder sounded all night and reverberated through the windows. The lighting felt as if it were right outside the window. And the rain kept coming. 6. 7. 8 inches. It fell in driving sheets with drops as big as summer raspberries. The following morning, a Friday, I don't think I was the only one surprised at the extent of the flooding here in Rochester. All that water had swept in while the city slept and we'd awoken to reports of the Zumbro River flooding.

However, as I got my family prepared for the day my thoughts were on oatmeal and skinned knees, and the night's storm was quickly becoming a dreamy memory. Then my phone rang: Channel One was flooded. The water backing up in the parking lot was up to the grills of our trucks and vans, but, thankfully, our food bank warehouse and food shelf were dry. As I hung up, all that water that I thought had passed over and was gone came roaring back into my consciousness, its potential for destruction and disruption cascading right through my morning.



As Executive Director of your regional food bank, I'm grateful to report that, after the water drained away, our equipment and facility have sustained relatively minor damage. I know, too, that all of you in and around La Crosse associated with WAFER Food Pantry are no strangers to flooding. With a few weeks' hindsight, though, this episode has given me cause to reflect on our food system and food insecurity.

Our food system is such a fragile thing and takes tremendous effort to sustain. Channel One works with many regional produce farmers to pick up and distribute surplus vegetables, and they have been telling us about the challenges associated with planting and harvesting during this exceptionally wet spring and early summer. Additionally, when rains or snows make for impassable roadways, distributing food across Channel One's 14-county service area—an area the size of the state of New Jersey—can become hazardous. This past winter, for instance, our trucks and drivers struggled on icy and snowed over roads.

But we are a well-resourced organization. When unexpected and severe weather causes delays we have the means to respond. This isn't always the case with so many of the clients served by WAFER and Channel One. For people coping with food insecurity, storms and floods—both literal and figurative, those unexpected, unplanned for events that sweep in during the night—are significant barriers for many families to access the food they need to lead productive and dignified lives. That's why the work at WAFER Food Pantry is so important. When the unexpected happens—an illness, a job lose, or water in the basement—WAFER is ready to help people meet the most basic of needs, nourishing and accessible food.

I'm proud of the work WAFER and Channel One do together to help people with the unforeseen circumstances that so often result in hunger. On behalf of all the staff and our Board of Directors, we thank WAFER Food Pantry for partnering with Channel One Regional Food Bank, a Feeding America Food Bank, to nourish our neighbors and build healthier, more resilient communities.

Virginia Merritt

Executive Director, Channel One Regional Food Bank



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WAFER is a United Way Partner Agency

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 on the right side of each page.

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

Thank you!