



**Summer 2021**

## **New Ideas For Greater Impact**

The ripple effect of the pandemic challenged and continues to challenge WAFER's staff to think outside of normal operations to create opportunities to reach people closer to home. For example, the Mobile Food Pantry became more important than ever as patrons wanted to avoid lines and public transportation. The Mobile Pantry continued serving people in highly concentrated areas or locations lacking in transportation options. And, the once monthly Saturday food distribution shifted from walk-thru to drive-thru to decrease contact. Discussions with our partner food bank, Channel One in Rochester, yielded the idea of mass



distributions over two months. Channel One would pre-pack frozen items (meat, butter, cheese, vegetables) and WAFER would pre-pack canned goods. Community partners across the county helped to determine best time and place, spread the word to their community, and we arrived with trucks of food to load into trunks as people came through.

In June and July, five locations in La Crosse County hosted "truck-to-trunk" distributions. About 50% of the people served had never utilized WAFER's services before. WAFER staff spoke to each attendee to share general information and services WAFER offers working to break down any barriers to help people meet their food needs. Now, new individuals and families are coming to our main location and mobile pantry sites throughout the county. That is huge success!!!



These events haven't only impacted new households, but patrons who have struggled with transportation to get to WAFER for help. Prior to one event, staff received a phone call from a patron familiar with our services. Jenny stated she lived near the upcoming event location. She asked if she could walk through with a stroller to



get food for her family. Her vehicle needs repair, but her financial situation makes that impossible and she hasn't been able to get to WAFER. The phone call provided a chance to talk about Mobile Pantry sites located near her to help with food needs to hopefully relieve some financial strain and move her closer to getting that vehicle repaired. Jenny is just one of many who benefit from these events and Mobile Pantry sites. Read more about impact with Joann's story (*A Message From The Executive Director*) and how attending one event changed her situation in huge ways.

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## A Message From The Executive Director

Since early spring patrons have been able to receive one complete food package per week. This is an increase from two per month since early in the pandemic and the typical one per month pre-pandemic. This opportunity is only possible thanks to your generous support, robust deliveries from the state, and local retailers. The benefit to our patrons is evident in the 300% increase in the number of families making use of the offer compare to last year. Food packages are filled with abundance and variety—canned goods, ten+ pounds of meat, bakery items, dairy products and eggs, miscellaneous frozen items, and a large assortment of product. Patrons can request the entire package or just a portion if they are still working through previous weeks allotments. These partial packages usually contain the “outside perimeter of a grocery store”, such as meat, eggs and dairy products, bakery, and produce. People who struggle with chronic illnesses, diabetes, or dietary restrictions find that the weekly produce option helps to meet a critical role in their overall health and disease management. Another group of patrons that have benefitted from the relaxed guidelines for frequency of visits are the people who continue to feel the ripple effect caused in the last year, people like Joann.

This summer, the staff has been in a sort of limbo due to a vacant position. As we shift duties among remaining staff, it isn't uncommon to find me working patron intake. It was a Thursday when Joann pulled up to the curbside registration area. I collected her drivers license and searched for her account in the database. When trying to register her visit for the day the computer prompted an alert, typically an expired address or a recent visit. I looked back to her visits first, since this is most common now with providing weekly packages, and she had received a food package the week before. I noticed that the previous visit had been her very first visit ever with WAFER. I asked Joann's permission to ask why she had only recently started coming. She said her daughter had heard about the special distribution event (Truck-to-Trunk) in West Salem and had encouraged her to go. At this point her eyes began to well with tears. Joann explained that *she had lost her job due to the pandemic*, she hasn't worked since, and her only income is social security which **“is not enough to live on. I haven't been shopping, just whatever I have in the house.”** I didn't inquire, but I definitely thought about how long it had been since she had access to any fresh foods. Joann became more emotional, **“WAFER has been such a blessing”**, repeating it several times. She said that she wished there was something she could do for WAFER, “what can I do for you?”. I thanked her for sharing her story, that coming was enough. I told her that the way she can help WAFER is to tell the people in her life about her experience and encourage them to do the same. Sometimes being brave and sharing the simple process to get food is enough for the uncertain person to be willing to take that next step for help. She was still crying and I reached my hand out the window to hold hers as we finished talking. Through her tears and even while she drove away she kept repeating, “thank you so much” and “what a blessing this is.”

As the Director, my job and daily functioning is often dictated by urgent equipment needs, fund development and grant writing/reporting, daily operations, volunteer recruitment, general administrative duties, creating community partnerships, and so much more. The most important part of WAFER, actually serving people, is not something that I am typically involved with and yet it is one of the greatest blessings to me as well. I enjoy interacting with our patrons, getting to know them, hearing about their challenges and strides, and witnessing the impact WAFER has. The greatest impact YOU are a part of creating! You can imagine that my interaction with Joann left me with a renewed purpose and enhanced passion for WAFER's mission. What an honor it is for me to serve. It is because of the “Joann's” that myself and WAFER's staff work tirelessly, pandemic or not. Thank you for being a part of our team and making a difference, one food package at a time.

In Service,



P.S. I realized the photo I include is a little outdated. Until I get a replacement I decided to show you out-of-office me. Pictured with me is my husband, Ryan, who is just as much a part of the WAFER team as those who are actual employees. Behind every Executive Director is a necessary support system of relatives, friends, volunteers, board members, and colleagues. I am so grateful for the many people who stand with me and help make WAFER the best it can be!



## Meet WAFER's Newest Board Members



Brad Clarkin joined the WAFER Board of Directors in 2014. After a two-year hiatus to tend to work responsibilities, the board is thrilled to welcome Brad again. Brad is currently the Production Operations Director of Kwik Trip, Inc. Prior to this role, Brad spent nearly two decades of successful experience in operations management, warehousing and logistic roles. Outside of the office, Brad is committed to spending time with his wife, Anne and his 12-year-old daughter, Lainey traveling near and far. Brad is passionate about supporting WAFER and working to eliminate hunger within our region.



Anne Clarkin moved to the La Crosse area in 2000 after “falling in love with the beautiful area and a local resident”. Their family knew of WAFER through church and local events, but began volunteering as a family in 2014 when Brad was asked to join the Board. Volunteering at the monthly Food Fairs was a way to include their young daughter. Anne said they “enjoyed not only filling a need for help, but also interacting with clients, and helping our daughter develop a sense of service. Our daughter Lainey, now 12, has grown to love WAFER as much as we do and often suggests giving more time to volunteer.” Anne said she feels fortunate to volunteer at the pantry weekly and honored to join the Board to further WAFER’s mission. Anne

has a Communications degree from UWL and brings professional experience in Human Resources. Their family loves the outdoors, especially camping and visiting the National Parks in an RV.

## More Than “Just” A Food Pantry, Continued...

The Winter 2020 newsletter identified areas how WAFER is more than “just” a food pantry and covered the topics our participants are usually surprised to learn about, specifically food programs and Nutrition Education. The last and likely most important function—**Food Rescue**.

According to Feeding America, “food rescue is **the practice of collecting high-quality food that would otherwise go to waste and distributing it to people facing hunger.**” This is accomplished by working with manufacturers, retailers, distributors, farmers, and partner food pantries to reduce food waste and get good food to people who need it most. Particularly, foods rescued provide for a well-balanced package since the bulk of rescued foods are fresh items such as meat, bakery, dairy, and produce. Without access to these fresh foods packages would mostly contain shelf-stable items received through the government commodities program and community donations. Offer a variety of nutritious foods encourages patrons, and provides an opportunity to make healthy choices.

WAFER’s food rescue program has three main sources:

(1) Local/national retail partnerships, some of which have been established by our national food banking system, Feeding America, are Walmart, Sam’s Club, Target, Aldi, Kwik Trip, and more. Locally there are many supportive businesses who participate; Linda’s Bakery, Great Harvest, Panera, Starbucks, Westby Creamery, Reinhart, and more.

Thanks to robust partnerships with (2) local food pantries, such as Neighbor for Neighbor in Tomah, together we rescue “rejected” retail product from (3) transportation companies and get it into the food system. The ability to accept large donations allows for product sharing among many pantries and benefit more people. This source typically is a semi-truck delivery to a retailer who declines the load/pallets due to a dented box, a load that shifted in transfer, or product that appears to have a short retail life. Companies often instruct the truck driver to destroy or donate the product since it is too costly to return it to the distributor.

The ability to participate in food rescue requires equipment and funding. Thanks to generous support WAFER is able to capitalize on this food source for a fraction of the cost of purchasing. In 2020, WAFER rescued more than 830,000 pounds of food (equivalent to nearly 700,000 meals) valued at \$830,000+ for approximately \$40,000 (or .04 per pound) in vehicle and staff expenses.



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Visit waferlacrosse.org to sign up and receive a monthly e-newsletter.



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](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!