



WAfer

FOOD PANTRY

Director's Message

WAfer NEWSLETTER | Winter | 2019

WAfer staff rarely hear from patrons once they no longer need food assistance. However, when we do hear from a client, the story is heartwarming and leaves our staff feeling a sense of success knowing we offered compassion while helping someone in a tough spot.

For “Stephanie”, life was great; a great job, two wonderful children, and the world her “oyster”. Then, an accident turned life upside down for Stephanie’s family. Over the next two years she endured several serious surgeries including hip replacement and spinal fusions. **A feeling of hopelessness came over her as she struggled to put food on the table for her children.**

Someone told Stephanie about WAfer, an organization she never knew existed until things in her life changed. Because of the help and positive attitude of the volunteers Stephanie didn’t have to “feel like a charity case” and used only what she needed to make it through the tough times. **WAfer helped to lighten her personal burden by providing good, healthy items for her family to eat.** “WAfer is a good thing” she states, helping to get her through until the “amazing changes in life” came.

During her visits to WAfer, Stephanie not only received food to feed her body, but **her soul was fed** as the volunteers encouraged her. Self confidence and a change in mindset built her back up. **She credits WAfer** for a portion of the amazing changes that followed.

Looking back, Stephanie can see just how far she has come, using the successes of her two businesses to help others who are struggling. Giving back to the organization that gave her more than groceries, is just one way she thanks WAfer for helping her get where she is today. When she stops at WAfer now, it isn’t for the food. It is to see the friends and smiles of those who helped her on this journey.

As we ended our conversation the last time we talked, the one who benefitted emotionally from volunteers was able to lift the spirits of the staff. Her sincere thanksgiving and appreciation for the smallest of gestures created a sense of accomplishment and success for the staff. “WAfer is a great thing. The good you do is priceless.”

Patrons frequently leave messages on my voicemail expressing gratitude for the food, praising the kindness of volunteers, and often detailing the ways that WAfer’s services are beneficial. I received a phone call from a patron who enrolled in the Senior Share food package delivery program. She called to find out when her next delivery would arrive. She explained that both her and her husband are disabled and government disability provides only \$500 monthly for both of them. **“We are really hurting.”** Their food package delivery includes canned goods –vegetables, fruit, pasta, peanut butter, soup, cereal, tuna, and more-, a dozen eggs, frozen meat, bakery items, and fresh produce and dairy products as available. **“We appreciate the program. It is good food and helps a lot.”**

Outreach services like those offered through the Mobile Food Pantry are just as impactful. This vehicle is literally the difference for people having food to put on the table or not. Over and over, our staff hear firsthand the difference this service makes: “I haven’t been to WAfer in 4 years because my truck broke down.” “You mean I get to get on board and choose my own foods?” “I can have as much produce as I want? Are you sure?”. Gratitude is not lacking at the Mobile Pantry sites. In fact, for one senior, it is the difference between having enough to eat or not. This senior told me that she is 65, worked until retirement, doesn’t receive Food Share or fuel assistance, and survives solely on Social Security. “I live alone, and living on Social Security has made a drastic change. **It’s a real struggle to get by sometimes.**” She explained that the Mobile Pantry coming to her neighborhood has been a “great blessing.” “The food I receive helps so much. It truly makes a difference and I appreciate it very much.”

Friends, this is the GOOD we do together! Your generosity touches the lives of thousands of people who live right here at home, our friends and our neighbors. With just \$1 we can provide 4 meals. Would you consider supporting our efforts this holiday season to ensure that everyone has enough food to put on the table and that no one goes hungry?

~Erin Waldhart, Executive Director



A few of the many ways the community supports WAFER



We were running very short on canned vegetables at the end of October. A delayed delivery of ordered vegetables and not finding out that we were not getting any with our government commodities delivery until the morning of the delivery led to the immediate need. Staff put out requests to the community, churches, business, etc to help get through to the next delivery less than one week out. The need was known and the community responded! The response wasn't just enough to get through to the next delivery, but enough to get through a week beyond that. What an amazing outpouring of love from so many in our community—individuals who brought in a few cans or a few cases, businesses (like Altra employees who were coming to volunteer anyway and also brought with bags of canned goods), The Rock Foundation (who immedi-

ately went out and purchased at least a quarter pallet), and so many more who helped to spread word about this need. It is amazing to witness love in action, the compassion and kindness given by people here in our own communities, and the way in which amazing people step up to make a difference for others while making local communities better for all.

Speaking about making a difference, students from our local universities continue to step up to the challenge. For instance, the picture to the right are just a few of the many women from UW-L's Womens Track and Field Team. Prior to Halloween each year the team goes door-to-door delivering flyers advertising a food drive they are coordinating. On Halloween they return to those homes to collect canned goods. Sometimes they even sport costumes, but the cold weather put a damper on the festivities this year so they were dressed as cold college students! More than 1200 pounds were collected this one evening!



Our friends from Lambda Chi Alpha (pictured at the left) from UW-L performed their first major philanthropy event by conducting a food drive for WAFER. They delivered flyers to selected neighborhoods and then returned a week later to collect the bags of food. With the help of sororities Tri Sigma and Alpha Phi the group was able to collect more than 700 pounds, equivalent to nearly 600 meals. The group has also committed to volunteer during the evening shift.

These groups of college students are just a few of the many volunteers who have or will be serving with WAFER this school year. Professors in select courses of study require their students to give a set number of hours per semester. Thanks to Robin Haugh, Assistant Professor at Viterbo School of Nursing, many top-notch students spend time working with pantry patrons to get firsthand experience with the population we serve and the barriers to good nutrition. College students aren't the only groups that we have been volunteering with us over the past few months. Some of the many groups who have been here are Altra Federal Credit Union, UPS managers (pictured bottom center), United Healthcare (pictured bottom right), La Crosse Realtors Association (pictured bottom left), Coulee Kids, RSM in La Crosse, Holmen Middle School students, Academy on the Prairie, UW Credit Union, and many more. All volunteers are critical to providing efficient and impactful service to pantry patrons. Volunteer groups provide many hands at one time to tackle the never-ending list of projects. Call our office or stop by if you would like to volunteer.

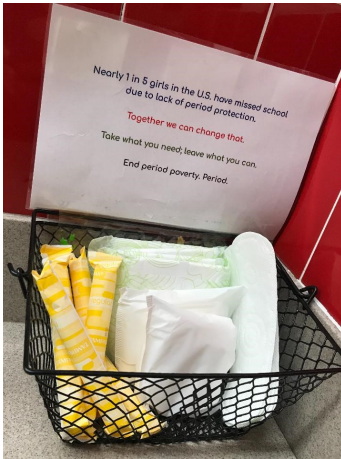


A message from The Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse

5,000 words, and yet we refuse to talk

For the past nine years, the Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse has supported WAFER to purchase menstrual products — more than \$16,000 in grant support and a handful of product donation drives have made a very limited supply available to women.

You may be shocked to be just learning of this service at WAFER. Stigma around menstruation isn't helping. Time of the Month, Aunt Flow, On the rag, Period: A recent survey found that there are over 5,000 euphemisms in 10 different languages used to refer to menstruation. However you choose to refer to menstruation, this taboo is part of what keeps us from addressing a very real issue in our community.



Nearly one in five students in the US have missed school or left early because they did not have access to period products. Because of the advocacy of students at Logan High School, the La Crosse School District will begin providing open access to these products in late January. But over the past year, students and faculty at Logan and Central High Schools have been filling the gap, enlisting the help of organizations like the Women's Fund to garner community support.

Having a period costs around \$7 per month per woman — a cost that is insurmountable to someone who struggles to put food on the table or pay rent. The situation gets much more dire, of course, when it's a single mom providing for a child or children who also menstruate.

Government assistance programs like SNAP and Medicaid do not cover access to these products. Yet, products like soap and toilet paper — other basic hygiene necessities — are covered.

More than 150,000 Wisconsin women aged 12 to 52 live below the poverty line, and without programs like WAFER, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and other pantries that are aware of these needs, they are unable to access menstrual products. They miss school, they miss work, they fall between the cracks.

Next time you're considering donating a can of food, consider throwing in a box of tampons, too. Unlike food or other nonperishable items that can be donated by grocery stores when they are just a smidge past their prime, period products do not expire. They are rarely donated in bulk, and they are expensive.

Our children deserve a shot at success in school, and women deserve dignity. You can also help alleviate period poverty in our community with your financial support to programs that are making these products available. No one should fear that they will be unable to manage their period.

Kaycie Green, Executive Director
Women's Fund of Greater La Crosse



Building a way to better service



December 2018, an aspiring Eagle Scout approached WAFER staff to offer a service project to improve service to patrons. Ethan Kramer, of Onalaska, heard our needs and set out to meet them. After 8 months of planning and construction, Ethan delivered two beautiful wood rolling produce units. Patron, staff, and volunteer reactions have been overwhelmingly positive since these units meet the need of displaying produce and creating a more pleasant environment. In October, Ethan received Eagle Scout promotion for his acts of service and many other achievements.

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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!