

Volunteers Take to the Community



This summer, WAFER Food Pantry volunteers have stepped up in a big way—amplifying their presence across the community to represent our mission at fundraisers, food drives, resource fairs, and local events. Their energy and commitment have helped raise awareness, gather much-needed supplies, and build meaningful connections.



Thanks to the drive of Board Member and Volunteer Committee Chair Mary Chilcote, our seasoned volunteers, staff, and board members were mobilized not just to support events, but to serve as ambassadors—sharing WAFER's story and the impact we have on over 40,000 individuals annually.



Despite more than 40 years of service, many in our community still aren't fully aware of who WAFER is or the scale of support we provide. That's why this outreach matters. We're committed to telling our story, elevating the voices of those we serve, recruiting new "helpers," and revealing the realities of hunger in our region.

You may have seen us at events like:

- 608 Brewing Company's *Hops For Hunger* Fundraiser
- Turtle Stack Brewery's *Pints for a Purpose* Fundraiser
- Hydrite Chemical's *Steals for Meals* \$100 donation per La Crosse Logger home game steal
- Walmart-La Crosse *Grill and Give* Food & Fund Drive
- La Crosse Concert Band's *WAFER Night* Food Drive
- Beer By Bike Brigade Bingo for Monetary Donations

And this is just the beginning—more events are on the horizon as we continue to connect, serve, and advocate.

Thank you to our volunteers for being the heart of this movement, and the mission.



A BITTERSWEET FAREWELL: FINAL FOODWISE CLASS MARKS A TRANSITION IN NUTRITION EDUCATION

On Tuesday, August 19, WAFER Food Pantry hosted the final nutrition education class led by FoodWise educators, closing the door on a partnership that has spanned more than a decade. This change comes in response to federal SNAP-Ed funding cuts, which have ended support for FoodWise programming statewide, effective September 30, 2025.

FoodWise educators have been an invaluable part of WAFER's mission. Their work extended far beyond the classroom—empowering pantry patrons with practical cooking tips, approachable recipes, and opportunities to try new foods. Their sessions helped individuals and families stretch

limited food budgets, increase produce consumption, and build confidence in the kitchen. Each class included tasting samples and a take-home gift tied to the lesson, making nutrition education both accessible and engaging. Thanks to a grant from People's Food Co-op, take-home gifts this past year—ranging from cookbooks and cutting boards to meal prep containers and a variety of kitchen utensils—have helped support healthy cooking at home.

Even during the pandemic (see second picture from the left below), Mary, Karie, and Emily adapted by offering virtual classes to ensure continued support. Their creativity and commitment helped WAFER shoppers discover new ingredients, like collard greens and lentils, and learn how to prepare them in simple, healthy ways. Feedback from participants over the years has been overwhelmingly positive, with comments like, "I never would have tried this, but I love it and will put in my cart when shopping in the pantry now."

Executive Director Erin Waldhart shared, "FoodWise educators have been an integral part of our mission. Their dedication made a lasting impact—not just at WAFER, but across the wider community. What a valuable resource they've been, and what a profound loss this is for our region."

While the partnership with FoodWise has come to an end, WAFER remains deeply grateful for the continued collaboration with dietitians from Mayo and Emplify. Their ongoing support ensures that pantry patrons will still have access to valuable nutrition education, empowering them with tools for healthy eating and budget-friendly cooking.



BUILDING CAPACITY, HOPE & DIGNITY; Capital Campaign Update

We are entering Year 3 of the capital campaign to fund our new facility. We are excited to share that more than 60% of the project has been funded!

The cost of the total project is \$4.6M, which allows for twice as much space, a location not prone to flooding, features a garage to store delivery trucks (which have been vandalized in the past), has abundant cooler and freezer space to store large donation offers, and most importantly, is a welcoming space for a dignified and personalized shopping experience.

Our Board President, Taylor Haley, recently wrote: *"As a pastor and longtime board president, I regularly meet individuals facing food insecurity—often alongside many other challenges. While our church can offer spiritual support - and even direct support at times, we don't have the infrastructure to meet some of the varied and complex needs that WAFER is able to meet. WAFER does what churches alone cannot, by providing consistent, nutritious food and a dignified shopping experience. The new facility is already making a difference—but now we need to finish what we started. That's why my family and our congregation are committed to supporting the Capital Campaign to help retire the remaining debt of \$1.6 million and ensure WAFER's future is as strong as its mission."*



You are invited to contribute to our Building Capacity, Hope & Dignity Capital Campaign. Capital Campaign gifts should be over and above regular contributions that support our day-to-day operations.

Gifts of cash and/or commitments to be given over a 3-year fulfillment period are welcomed. By using the QR code below, you can make a one time gift or a 3-year pledge.

A tax benefit may be realized by making an IRA Charitable Distribution gift. Individuals age 70.5 or older may consider making a gift through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA. These gifts can be counted toward satisfying your required minimum distributions (RMD) for the year. **A QCD excludes the amount donated from taxable income.**

WAFER can accept gifts of stock, bonds, or mutual funds. You can transfer stock to WAFER and take a tax deduction based on the market value of the stock at the time of the gift.

You can also make a gift through your Donor-Advised Fund. It is important to contact your donor advisor, accountant, or attorney for guidance when considering one of the tax advantage options.

Are you a Thrivent member? WAFER is an approved organization for the Thrivent Choice® program, which allows eligible members to direct Choice Dollars® to support our mission. These funds—earned through your premiums and contract values—can be designated to WAFER at no cost to you. It's a simple, and an impactful way to help our community. To learn more or to direct your Choice Dollars, visit thrivent.com.

If you have questions about any of these giving options, please contact Erin Waldhart at 608-782-6003 or email waferdirector@waferlacrosse.org.



**Every gift makes
a difference.**

**Thank you for
your consideration!**



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OUR MISSION: RESPONDING TO GOD'S LOVE, WAFER PROVIDES FOOD AND WORKS TO ELIMINATE HUNGER.

FROM THE HEART

Every month, we're humbled by the unexpected ways our community shows up—through memorial gifts, spontaneous donations, and quiet acts of service. These gestures, though varied, share a common thread: compassion in action. Here's a sampling from the past few months that touched us deeply:

- Bangor FFA students planted, harvested (with the help of parents), and delivered thousands of pounds of sweet corn—bringing shoppers the highest nutrition possible, straight from the field to the pantry. What a special treat!
- A memorial gift for Byron Clements and Greta was given to supply pet food—reminding us that pets are deeply important to those we serve, offering companionship and comfort during life's hardest moments.
- Students from Immanuel Lutheran School assembled birthday kits for pantry patrons, ensuring that specials days will be celebrated.
- Five-year-old Elliot asked for food donations instead of birthday presents—his generosity helped stock pantry shelves and reminds us that anyone, at any age, can be a changemaker.

These moments reflect the heart of our mission and the amazing heart of our community.

