



FLAT RIVER
OUTREACH
MINISTRIES

20
YEARS
OF SERVICE
SINCE 1998



TREE OF HOPE

The roots of the tree represent those who gave donations and grants to help build the financial foundation of Flat River Outreach Ministries. The leaves represent those who gave generously of their time and resources to make this ministry a reality.

ROOTS:

- J.T. Builders

Clark Ellis Post 152

King and Marie Doyle

Norm Borgerson and Judy Schaub

Brian and Cheryl Doyle

American Legion
- Lowell Area Community Fund

Lowell Masonic Lodge

King Milling Co.

Look Memorial Fund

Howard Thurtell

Lowell Rotary Club

LEAVES:

- James and Judy Sterling

Leonard and Gloria Jackson

O.E. Bieri and Sons Inc.

Dan Brubaker

Rev. Tim Harmon

Ethel Stears

Virgil and Margaret Baker

Bill and Nancy Wood

Sylvia Taylor

Pat and Cindy Kehoe

Shari Lawarre

Billie Fallstrom

Bill Allex The Roofers Inc.

Jim Sowle

Tom Karp Allied Heating and Cooling

Donna Jean Ford

Ann Dimmick

Al and Marlene Heemstra

Heemstra Heating and Plumbing

Kraig and Jody Haybarker

Richard and Kathleen Horsch Galaxy Signs and Awards
- Men's Bachelor's Club

Lowell High School

Diane Hollister

Leo and Madelyn Pfaller

Lowell Women's Club

Mr. and Mrs. Mike Rooze

Lin Beenen

Josef and Maria Mogor

Ken Bosscher

Dr. Donald Gerard

Nancy Churches

Ruth Collar

Rev. Gordie Barry

Jane Bosserd Neighbors Who Care

Karin Hale Cousins' Hallmark

Floors by Design

Herman and Bonnie Westrate

Mike and Kathy Clark

June Dilly

Rev. Roger Lawarre

Margaret Gardner

Ray Wolfe

Margarie Zimmerman

Vern Venneman

Lowell Lions Club

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FLAT RIVER OUTREACH MINISTRIES (FROM) HISTORY

Flat River Outreach Ministries (FROM) is a nonprofit organization focused on bringing together individuals, families, churches, and businesses to respond to the needs of our neighbors in the greater Lowell community.

ORGANIZED IN 1998 BY 13 LOCAL churches, FROM began as an Access Six food pantry in the basement of the First United Methodist Church in Lowell with the purpose of addressing hunger in the Lowell area. The organization grew to what it is today because it responded to needs of the community.

In 1999 founding members applied for grant funds from the Lowell Area Community Fund of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation to purchase a building at 519 Main Street. At this location, FROM would open a Thrift Store and offer financial services along with the food pantry and Christmas gift and food distribution. FROM utilized community volunteers to get the building ready for occupancy. Even before the doors were officially opened, it was clear based on volunteer support and donations that the community was in support of this ministry.

It didn't take long before FROM realized it was outgrowing its current location and began officially looking for a new facility. A committee of the Board of Directors looked at many possible options during a three year period, but felt God was guiding them to keep looking. It wasn't until 2007 that all the pieces would fall into place for FROM to move into its current building (11535 Fulton Street East); former home of Cumberland Manor. The Board of Directors felt confident that this new building would give the agency significant room to

expand as needed and would allow more space for the popular thrift shop.

Since its inception, FROM had operated with a volunteer-run model and now needed to add employees to help meet the day-to-day needs of the agency. In 2009, a Bookkeeper and Executive Director were hired (part-time) and the organization's most ambitious fundraising campaign, River of Hope, began with a goal to raise \$1.4 million to renovate the building and the thrift shop.

Thanks to generous donations the campaign raised enough funds and the renovations were all completed by 2013 with the remodel of the Thrift Store. The community was asked to help FROM name the store before it re-opened. A committee of Thrift Shop volunteers reviewed all submissions and picked the name "Treasures Thrift Shop."

By 2015 FROM had grown to a staff of seven part-time employees and was offering close to a dozen programs. At that time, the ministry shifted from a transactional to a transformational service model. To help facilitate this change, the Connections Office was added as an access point for all programs. The Connections Office utilized volunteers to work with individuals and families to help identify and address needs, even if they were outside the services FROM offered. The new service model went beyond just simply providing financial services to helping empower



neighbors to set individual goals and work together to achieve them.

In 2016 FROM purchased five lots, including two homes on East Main Street in Lowell to address affordable housing. Immediately volunteers began working on repairs and safety improvements, while staff and a task force dove into a pilot program to manage and assess tenants' housing needs. FROM also added a Social Worker in 2016 to offer case management services and an Intake Specialist in 2017 to help direct those seeking services.



RIVER OF HOPE SUPPORTERS:

Lowell Area Community Fund, Lowell Cable TV Endowment, Essential Needs Task Force Fund, a division of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Lowell Community Fund, King Milling, Lowell Family Medical Center, Sebastian Foundation, Steelcase Foundation, Amway, the Kate and Richard Wolters Foundation, Meier, Inc., Masonic Lodge 355- Belding/Ionia, Galaxy Signs and Awards, Lowell Area Churches, Bank of America Matching Gifts Program, Modern Photographics, Hooper Printing, LLC., DPI Signs and Graphics, Rock Solid Concrete, Residential Images, LLC, All-Weather Seal of West Michigan, and many community members

VOLUNTEERS AS THE HEARTBEAT

Before the agency officially opened, groundwork was being laid for a volunteer model that would set the ministry apart from most non-profit organizations.

THE COMMUNITY HAS BEEN RALLYING around FROM in remarkable ways from the very beginning. In fact, the walls put up in the building on 519 E. Main Street would not have been there if volunteers hadn't donated their time. Founding member Rev. Roger Lawarre recalls a number of people who volunteered every Saturday for about a year to get the first building ready for FROM. "This was intentional," he remembers, "we wanted to get the community involved and to feel that ownership."

The community certainly responded! When word got out about the opening of a Thrift Shop, the items being donated

filled up the garages of volunteers across town and King Milling offered use of one of their buildings to house the rapidly increasing donations. "I seem to remember that Roger couldn't even open his garage," laughs Ann Dimmick, longtime volunteer and Board Member.

As soon as FROM moved into that first building it was clear that the need for programs and the Thrift Shop had already outgrown the space, but it was also evident that FROM was having an effect in the community. "By this time," Roger remembers, "the community was already committed to this ministry."

That commitment was not only for special projects, but also for the day-to-day tasks to keep the ministry running. "For 10 years we operated strictly with volunteers," says Jody Haybarker, founding member and former Food Pantry Director. "Once the pantry was set up and the guidelines in place, the volunteers took over and ran the pantry. They were always willing to do whatever needed to be done. I can't say enough good things about the volunteers that work in the pantry."

When FROM moved to its current location in 2007, it was again an army of volunteers who showed up to help. "There were pickup trucks lined down the street and they backed right up to the

basement door of the old building," Ann remembers. "The football team was lined up on the steps and passed the boxes from one person to another right into the truck." She said it was a similar set up at the new building and, despite it being a big move, "I don't remember it being difficult. I just remember it was so fun and exciting coming to the new building and all the opportunities available to us."

“Volunteers have been the heartbeat of this ministry from day one and it's that heartbeat that keeps the blood flowing.” Roger

The growth of FROM is largely credited to volunteers. "The volunteers are the backbone of FROM. They are the ones who shaped FROM into what it is today and keep it moving forward. Our volunteers take pride and ownership in FROM and continue to come up with new ideas," says Jody. "FROM would not be where it is today without the support of this community. The fundraising dollars, monetary donations, food donations, thrift shop donations, all of the volunteers. have made it possible for FROM to grow."

MORE THAN JUST A THRIFT SHOP

When the Thrift Shop first opened on Main Street in 1999, no one knew how this new venture would impact the community. What started as a means to help financially support FROM quickly became more than that; it became a family of volunteers.

MAE DEAN, AGE 84, STARTED volunteering in the donation area before the Thrift Shop opened. She remembers the community was incredibly generous right from the beginning. "Bags and bags covered the floors. It was just amazing to see wall to wall black garbage bags full of clothing donations. We didn't know what to expect then, so we just took it one day at a time."

Volunteer Marilyn Lambson, 85, started in 1999 as a Thrift Shop Supervisor and soon was managing the entire store, which at that time was located at the original building on Main Street. She saw part of FROM's mission was not only to provide a place for people to get rid of items they no longer needed, but also to offer a place for people to get to know each other by giving back to the community; "it filled a need people had to connect with others," she says.

FROM was quickly gaining a reputation for helping its neighbors. Marion Wheat, 85, started volunteering in the early days of the Thrift Shop because, "FROM was helping so many people. I just loved to see it helping the whole community. They just do so much for people."

Volunteers in the early days would carry donations down to the basement for sorting and then back up the stairs to the store until 2007, when FROM moved to the

current location on Fulton Street. In 2013, the store underwent renovations, which included adding a larger donation room. At that time, the community was asked to submit names for the store and "Treasures Thrift Shop" was chosen. Due to continued growth, FROM hired a Thrift Shop Supervisor in 2015; still relying on volunteers in all other aspects of the store.

While the store has grown over the years, all proceeds have continued to support FROM programs. Store sales now account for 40% of FROM's budget and over 200 volunteers donate their time in the store each year.

FROM volunteers take great pride in the role they play in the success of the store, and know that Treasures is more than just a thrift shop; it's family. Mae Dean, Marilyn, and Marion all continue to volunteer at the store not only because of FROM's mission, but because the people they work with have become family. Mae Dean says, "I love the program. I'm rewarded by doing this and I enjoy the camaraderie with all the ladies I work with; they have become like my second family and have provided lots of support." Marilyn still volunteers because "I need something worthwhile to do and I like to do it." Marion says, "I love volunteering and being with the people. I adore the people I work with. We are like a big family."



FROM
timeline

THE LOWELL MINISTIRIUM met with the coordinator of the Access Six food pantry at First United Methodist Church in Lowell, about expanding the pantry and ways to help meet the needs of the people in the Lowell area. A committee of representatives from thirteen area churches was formed to brainstorm and develop a plan of action.

1997



1998



FLAT RIVER OUTREACH MINISTRIES (FROM) was formed as a Christian non-profit run entirely by volunteers and overseen by a 26 member Board of Directors, with two representatives from each of the churches involved.

1999



FROM MOVED INTO THEIR FIRST BUILDING at 519 E. Main St. in Lowell. The Thrift Shop was added as a way to support the organization.

HONORING VOLUNTEERS

Each and every FROM volunteer makes a difference in the community through their volunteer service.

Over the years, the FROM Board of Directors voted to name both the Client Choice Food Pantry and the Donation Room after two volunteer couples who have shaped both of those areas. While this represents a very small percentage of our volunteers, FROM believes that each and every one of our volunteers play an important role in the organization and we appreciate all of those who choose to donate their time at FROM.



THE JODY AND KRAIG HAYBARKER FOOD PANTRY
Jody and Kraig Haybarker, founding members of FROM, were in charge of the Food Pantry at the Lowell United Methodist Church, which grew into what is now FROM. Jody also served as the Food Pantry Coordinator until 2012.

When it comes to their involvement in the creation of Flat River Outreach Ministries, Kraig jokes, "If we had known what we were getting into we may have run the other way, but really it all happened in baby steps and not all at once." Jody adds, "FROM has been a great adventure for us and a great learning experience for

our kids and grandkids, they have all worked with us at some point. FROM has taken on its own identity and continues to grow in many directions. We are proud to be part of FROM, it is part of who we are; it has made us look at the world in a different way. When you have a mission and people working together you can accomplish anything."

In 2011, the Client Choice Food Pantry was named the "Jody and Kraig Haybarker Food Pantry" to honor the role they played in the formation of FROM, their contributions to the organization, and their commitment over many years to the food pantry.



THE JOHN AND CAROL GUYER DONATION ROOM
John and Carol Guyer began volunteering at FROM in 2011 and during that time have logged over 16,000 volunteer hours. They have helped out in many areas, including Food Commodities, but the majority of the time they have worked in the Thrift Shop.

While in the Thrift Shop, they have spent their time sorting the donations in the donation room. Their level of dedication has been unparalleled, and over the years they have volunteered Monday through Saturday; even coming in on the occasional Sunday.

They volunteer because, as Carol says, "This place is very special to me and to John; its home. I feel honored and loved and it's my happy place. I've made life-long friends here." Volunteering has made a difference in their lives too, "when John was alive and volunteering here it made him happy too and gave him a sense of belonging. Volunteering at FROM gave us both a sense of self-worth."

In 2016, the FROM Board of Directors voted to name the donation room in honor of the couple due to their dedication and passion for the organization as well as the impact they have had on the donation room.

A LIFETIME OF CARING FOR OTHERS

Karen spent her life caring for others, but when she needed help she felt guilty accessing services until she came to FROM. She quickly knew she had to give back because giving of herself is a part of who she is.

YOU CAN'T BE AROUND KAREN WITHOUT
sensing her joy and gratefulness. She has spent her life in service to others; she had a career as a Hospice Nurse, took in foster children, and currently cares for her parents. She's a cancer survivor, mom to three adult children, grandma to four grandchildren, and has a strong faith in God.

Karen first came to FROM because her family needed help making ends meet. Her husband had retired early and she was on disability. Despite cutting back where they could and canceling all the "extras" like cable TV, they were facing a shortfall each month.

Karen remembers being nervous to ask for help. The first time she went to the Food Pantry she sat and cried. "I felt bad that I was taking from someone else who needed it more," she recalls. One of the volunteers reassured her. "She told me that 'everyone needs help sometimes and God brought you here.' No one made me feel bad," she remembers. "They were happy that I came and they all wanted to help. We really wouldn't have made it without FROM."

Every time Karen was at FROM, "I felt the love of the Lord so strongly and enjoyed going there. I knew I just had to give back." She soon signed up for a volunteer

orientation and began volunteering as a Receptionist.

“ God planted you guys here and He is using you; it's awesome. You are employees of the Lord.” Karen

Her desire to give back to others extends beyond the walls of FROM. "The gift God gave me was to be a caregiver," she says. "I will use that talent in whatever way He wants me to and in whatever situation He puts in front of me," she says. Karen uses her caregiving skills in her volunteer roles as an ordained chaplain with the prison system and the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans (GRHV) and with the "No Member Dies Alone" program where she spends time with Veterans who are entering their final stages of life. She also writes to inmates through a prison ministry and continues to be a caregiver for her aging parents. When asked how often she volunteers, she smiles, "I have one day when I'm at home and not volunteering."

Karen's love of volunteering is infectious. She shares, "volunteering is rewarding in so many ways. The rewards are priceless when you volunteer. I'm so blessed to be able to give back because of everything God has given me; I just got to keep

paying it forward. Every time I volunteer it's just another blessing."

Because she remembers what it was like to first ask for help, Karen sometimes uses her experience to help comfort others who come to FROM. She encourages others and says, "Don't be afraid to come get help. Everyone here will greet you with open arms. Their goal is to help you get what you need. There is nothing to be afraid of; we are all family here."

When she thinks about FROM and her experience, she says, "God planted you guys here and He is using you; it's awesome. You are employees of the Lord."



DID YOU KNOW?

FROM relies on over 300 volunteers each year to provide over 40,000 hours of service.



2003

PARTNERING WITH FEEDING AMERICA,
FROM began bringing the Foodmobile to Lowell each month.



2004

FROM BEGAN OFFICIALLY LOOKING for a new location as it was quickly outgrowing the current space.



2007

AFTER COMPLETING ITS SEARCH for a new facility, FROM moved into the current location at **11535 E. Fulton St.** in Lowell.





PROGRAMS ARE THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO

If FROM volunteers are the heartbeat of what we do, then the programs we offer are the heart; neither one would exist without the other. With the support of volunteers, FROM has walked alongside thousands of our neighbors during their times of need. We currently offer over a dozen programs to serve individuals, families, and the community.

LUNCH BUDDIES

Lunch Buddies is a lunch program offered on winter, spring, and summer school breaks to all students (3 years old through twelfth grade) who live in the Lowell Area School District. Children are able to shop for five meals each week in a special pantry designed for them with a focus on nutrition education.

FOODMOBILE

FROM partners with local churches each month to bring the Feeding America Foodmobile to the fairgrounds. The truck is full of produce and other food items and is available to Lowell residents.

COMMODITIES/SENIOR COMMODITIES

FROM operates as a United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) Commodities and Senior Commodities site. These programs include income guidelines and, unlike the food pantry, those who utilize this service receive specific food items (determined by USDA). Senior Commodities distributes food monthly while the Commodities distributes eight times a year.

CLIENT CHOICE FOOD PANTRY

The Jody and Kraig Haybarker Food Pantry is the only food pantry in Lowell. The client choice pantry allows clients to shop for a four-day supply of food which includes milk, eggs and fresh produce.

BACKPACK PROGRAM

Near the end of the summer, FROM offers the Backpack program so students can start the school year off right! Students living in the Lowell Area School District sign up to receive a free backpack filled with school supplies specific to the school that they attend. Families also receive free hygiene products and free haircuts are offered on-site.

CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

FROM's Christmas programs make Christmas a little brighter for Lowell area families who come to FROM and pick out toys and other gifts for their school aged children. Christmas baskets filled with all the fixings for a traditional holiday meal are also available.

NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

Each fall, FROM partners with The Lowell Ledger and the Lowell Rotary Club to provide free home repairs and weatherization for homeowners in the Lowell community through the Neighbor to Neighbor program. Individuals submit their wishes and volunteer work crews are assembled to help meet the needs. Past projects have included floor repair, window replacement, and more.

UTILITY PAYMENT PROGRAM

Utility Payment Program or UPP (formerly called the Michigan Energy Assistance Program or MEAP), is a state funded program to help families who are behind on their energy bills reach self-sufficiency. Participants make goals and develop a plan to achieve them. They also receive a home energy audit to assess the energy efficiency of their home and small repairs/ weatherization needs are addressed. Money management classes are also available.

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

In partnership with United Way and the IRS, FROM is a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site which offers free Tax preparation and e-filing. Certified volunteers are trained to maximize tax credits and refunds. This program is offered each year in order to meet tax filing deadlines.

MONEY MANAGEMENT

FROM's Money Management class is designed specifically for those who want to learn more about managing their personal finances. Classes are interactive and engaging with group discussions and activities on a variety of topics such as sound budgeting, how to manage and develop credit, spending and saving techniques, and much more.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

FROM provides Employment Services including support and coaching (as it relates to job searches), interviewing skills, networking, computer skills, and more.

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT LOAN

FROM's Medical Equipment Loan closet offers free use of donated medical equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers, and more. Donations of gently used equipment is also accepted, which is then cleaned and examined by medical professionals before being made available for use.

CONNECTIONS OFFICE

The Connections Office is the central intake office for FROM. The intake personnel help navigate people to FROM's internal services and/or other resources that may be needed. Financial assistance for housing, utility, or other crises is also offered.



“ I’ve seen FROM grow from social service agency to empowerment center. Who wouldn’t want to be a part of that?”
Board Member Jodie Sees

DID YOU KNOW?

When FROM began in 1998, an average of twelve families were served each month from that church basement

In 2001, the Food Pantry served an average of 23 families each month. In 2006 it averaged 53, and in 2017 it grew to an average 170 families every

FROM HIRED ITS FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Mary Novello, and a Bookkeeper. Backpacks and summer lunch are added to a growing list of FROM programs.

River of Hope, FROM's Capital Campaign began and Food Fight is formed as a creative annual fundraiser.

2009



2010

RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEED, FROM added the Neighbor to Neighbor program (in partnership with the Lowell Rotary and the Lowell Ledger).

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TAMELA SPICER replaces Mary Novello.

2011



MAKING AN IMPACT

Charity was going through a difficult season in life when she was paired with a FROM Empowerment Coach who helped her re-establish her life and she is now making an impact in the lives of others.



IN 2015 FROM PARTNERED WITH THE Salvation Army on a one-time program to provide financial assistance and a volunteer mentor to someone facing homelessness. Ethel, a FROM Empowerment Coach/mentor, was paired with Charity, mother of five. Charity had recently gone through a divorce and found herself without income and no place for she and her children to live.

Through the program Charity was able to build a relationship with Ethel that would soon move beyond a mentorship and into friendship. Charity remembers that part of what made the program so meaningful

was Ethel's ability to; "point out the positives and strengths in myself that I couldn't see and help lay out a plan. I was broken in spirit and, when you're broken, you are not motivated."

Together they laid out a plan and Charity soon secured housing and a job. FROM provided financial assistance so she had some breathing room during those first few months. "The financial piece was a huge help," Charity says. "Without it we would have been living paycheck to paycheck. The program brought me to a place where I didn't have to worry about the rent being paid. It was a way to get a cushion and not constantly be behind."

Since she was new to the area, Ethel helped Charity connect with other services, like daycare, FROM's Lunch Buddies, and the Food Pantry. **"At FROM we were always greeted with a smile and everyone would speak to my kids; we were not invisible,"** she remembers.

Charity now uses her experience with FROM in her career as a substitute teacher. "What I went through being divorced and homeless has helped me to be able to be compassionate with my class," she shares. "When you have needs that are not being met, it's hard to do what you have to do. I'm able to understand and offer reassurance and connect with my students.

I am able to have that same love in my heart now as I was shown at FROM."

Ethel believes that Charity's greatest accomplishment in the program was to get her life re-established on a productive track. "She had gone through a difficult season in her life, during which time she fell behind in some critical ways," says Ethel. "She already had strong values, a good work ethic and a college education. Given this extra support during a crisis time, she was able to do what she needed to do. She established her children in school, obtained a good job, and put all of the pieces in place that would allow her to move ahead in life."

Ethel says, "In Charity I have found a friend who is caring and responsive. Just by sharing her life with me, Charity has served as an important reminder that anyone can become homeless if life's circumstances become too difficult. I so admire the way that she has sought work that fits well with her responsibilities as a parent. It is a joy to be a part of her life and to watch her wonderful children grow and develop into productive, promising young people."

In reflecting on the program, Charity says, "I thank God for FROM. I don't know where we would be without it and the impact it had on my life and my kids' lives."

WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

FROM works with the schools to address needs and provide service opportunities for students.



NATE FOWLER, DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM and District Homeless Liaison for the Lowell Area Schools District, has been involved

with FROM for nearly ten years. He believes one of the biggest benefits of the partnership between FROM and the

schools is, "knowing that FROM is just a phone call away. If kids need backpacks, clothing, or winter boots, there is always someone on the other side of the phone at FROM who takes the family in with open arms and supports them. Even if it's a housing issue or an electric bill, it's nice to have this first line of help just a phone call away to support our families. We appreciate how eager FROM is to help and support our families. It's gratifying to know that FROM is always there."

In addition to providing assistance for Lowell Area School District families, Nate appreciates how FROM offers opportunities for kids to serve and give back to their community. "When students volunteer at FROM they meet other volunteers who may have accessed FROM services, but they are now helping others. I love that mindset of taking care of each other."

PARTNERING WITH CHURCHES TO SERVE

FROM continues to foster relationship with local churches to serve those who may have unmet needs and offer church members the opportunity to serve others by volunteering their time at FROM.



IMPACT CHURCH OF LOWELL AND IT'S congregation of around 1,300 people have been involved with FROM for over ten years. The

church has encouraged parishioners to volunteer their time and has also referred those in need to connect with FROM directly for services. Executive Pastor, Ryan Kresge, serves on FROM's Board of Directors and is the 2018 Board of Directors Chairperson.

Ryan believes one of FROM's strengths is the ability to, "unify the community and create a space where multiple entities can come together to provide care and love the way God calls us to. When it comes to understanding the magnitude of what we can do together as opposed to alone, FROM gets that right time and time again," he says.

During his time with FROM, Ryan has seen the agency move to a service model that sets the agency apart as it responds to people in a way that says, "feed me because I'm hungry and love me because I'm human."

"FROM is a place where people can come together and use their talents and gifts to bring about transformation in the lives of those among us who are sometimes bound by the system and often neglected in a helpless position," says Ryan. "When we come together as followers of Jesus to be His presence and vision in the world, it's everything; from therapeutic, to service, to spiritual renewal by the kindness of Jesus through the helping hands of His people!"



LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORTING ITS NEIGHBORS

FROM has been fortunate to have positive relationships with many local businesses, like King Milling, who value helping their neighbors.



IN 1999 WHEN FROM WAS A BRAND NEW non-profit looking to add a thrift shop, King Milling offered space to store those donations; even before the doors opened. Their relationship with FROM has remained steady over the years. Brian Doyle, President of King Milling Co., recalls volunteering his time to help lay flooring at the building on Main Street before it opened. He has continued to volunteer through Lowell Rotary on various weatherization and home repair projects FROM has completed. King Milling has also been a Matching Sponsor of Food Fight, FROM's annual fundraising campaign, and has supported several of

FROM's fundraising initiatives over the years. When asked why King Milling continues to be a great community partner to FROM, Brian states "I like having FROM in town. If somebody has an issue, FROM is there to support them. It's nice to know that FROM is there for our fellow neighbors." Having been a staple in Lowell since 1890 and in the Doyle family for over 100 years, King Milling knows what it means to be a good neighbor. Brian says that being connected with FROM is, "another way we can all come together. We have been involved in this community for generations; it's home."

BRINGING COMMUNITY TOGETHER

FOOD FIGHT, FROM'S ANNUAL community-wide fundraiser, started in 1998 as a friendly competition between North and South Lowell where each food item and dollar donated translates into one point for your team.

No one could imagine how much it would grow- all because of the great community we call home. In fact, Rick Seese, former FROM Board Member who came up with the idea and led the fundraiser until 2015 says, "after year one, Brian Williams (from NBC) posted our efforts on his website. I then had inquiries from other cities in other states as to how we created and

ran it. There may be other 'Food Fights' in America, but none as big as ours." "I'm really proud of the Lowell community and business owners for their continued support of Food Fight. There are a lot of volunteers that help make it so successful and everyone deserves a big thank you for all of their efforts. It really feels like the entire community plays a part every year for Food Fight; donating money, food, or efforts to make it work so well. **The North and South compete, but Lowell truly is one big team that helps each other in their time of need."**



“ Since we were involved in the program we’ve paid off a lot of our debt, we bought our first home and we were able to finance two newer vehicles. Your program helped us a lot and changed our way of doing things!” FROM Client

A TREASURES THRIFT SHOP COORDINATOR and Communications Director joined the FROM staff. The summer lunch program added service over Spring Break. Financial Assistance is renamed the "Connections Office."

2015



2016

TWO HOMES ARE PURCHASED on Main Street in Lowell in order to address the issue of affordable housing in the community and meetings held with area non-profits to develop a plan to renovate the homes, and bring them up to code. FROM hires a Social Worker to oversee the Connections Office and work directly with clients to meet needs.

2017



A CENTRAL INTAKE SPECIALIST was added to address an ever increasing call volume through the Connections Office.

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

The Lowell Area Community Fund, established by Harold J Englehart, has provided financial support to FROM since its inception. This support has been essential to the growth and impact FROM has seen over the last twenty years.

THE LOWELL AREA COMMUNITY FUND of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation has been a supporter of FROM since 1998 and over the years has supported requests for strategic planning, board development, communication strategies, facility feasibility studies, and more. Kate Luckert Schmid, Vice President of Program at Grand Rapids Community Foundation says that, "From the very beginning, FROM has been an inspirational organization to partner with—talented, committed, and focused on service to the community. We could always count on the leaders of FROM to be good stewards of the resources provided. It was also evident that Roger LaWarre, as Chair, represented a Board that was open and eager to learn more about how to solidify and grow FROM in order to meet the growing needs in the community."

In 2008 the fund recommended the FROM Board of Directors undergo Board Development training, which longtime Board Member Ann Dimmick credits to helping FROM become the organization it is today. "We learned more about non-profits and how they worked. Up until that point we had let our hearts lead, but after that we were able to put together the by-laws, policies, and documents that helped FROM move beyond that point and help it become the organization that it is today."

Kate echoes, "The Lowell Area Community Fund has always believed that organizations who are willing to spend the time and energy to focus inward on building a firm organizational foundation are the best investments. FROM is a shining example of that approach. We are proud to have come along side to partner when needed over the past 20 years and look forward to seeing what the next 20 years brings." Janean Couch, Program Director, Grand Rapids Community Foundation says, "I think the fund continues our partnership with FROM because they are continuing to meet the needs of the community in a way that is responsive and adaptive. In the short amount of time that I've been working with FROM, and Executive Director Dawn Broene specifically, I've seen them conduct outreach to different nonprofits, businesses, and other organizations, get information about their services out into the community, and leverage their network and resources. While the fund does provides support to FROM, it is really their ability to think differently about how they work within the community that has been the primary reason for their growth, their sustainability, and their impact."



DID YOU KNOW? In 2015 FROM changed from transactional to transformational service model. This means instead of simply providing a service; we also focus on empowering people to create paths to reach their goals. FROM offers space in our 40,000 square foot building for the Lowell Radio Club, Healing Room, Baby Pantry of Lowell and Four Health.

MAIN STREET HOUSING

For a long time FROM had been looking into ways to address the housing issues in the Lowell area and, in 2016, was able to start down the path towards making that dream a reality.



WHEN FROM BEGAN IT WAS TO ADDRESS the basic needs of hunger in the Lowell area. However, as time went on, it became apparent that those needs go beyond just food. Over the years FROM has earned a reputation of meeting needs and determining how to be a part of the solution.

In 2016, FROM found itself in the position to act on a long held desire to address the affordable housing issue in Lowell. Members of FROM's Board of Directors and staff began meeting with other non-profits that work in the affordable housing arena to understand the needs in the Lowell area and to brainstorm how FROM could be involved. Research led the Board of Directors to approve the purchase of two homes along Main Street in Lowell. One of the homes is unoccupied and the other one housed nearly a dozen tenants, despite the building being in need of some significant repairs. In late 2016, FROM created a LLC called Main Street Housing to be the official entity for the housing programs, although it is still an arm of FROM.

Volunteers and contractors began making repairs on the building that is currently occupied. Even though FROM

is not taking any new tenants at this time, FROM is working with those currently living in the building to make improvements to the facility and to foster a sense of community. Monthly tenant meetings have taken place, which allow tenants to voice any concerns and also get to know their neighbors. A few of the tenants were also in need of services, so FROM has helped them connect with programs like Meals on Wheels, in-home care, employment services, and more. The current tenants have been very pleased with the progress that FROM has made since taking over the homes, and have expressed they feel FROM has their best interests at heart.

The FROM Board of Directors and staff have also been having conversations about how best to use the other building and determine the long term goals and vision for Main Street Housing. In 2018, Main Street Housing plans to unveil this vision to the community.

“ We are thankful EVERY day that FROM bought this house. We are VERY, VERY thankful for all the volunteers who work down here. They fix our doors, windows, leaks, repairs — you name it. They are the best. God bless them!” Tim

Tim works two jobs and has been a longtime resident of the house on Main Street. He says that FROM purchasing the homes has made a big difference. “Now that FROM owns the place, we all have a lease and everybody pays. That is a good thing for everyone.”



He also has seen FROM make a difference in the lives of his neighbors with the addition of a laundry room, which they hadn't had for over ten years, and many safety features like locks for the doors, smoke detectors, and more.

LOOKING FORWARD

FROM's programs have grown and expanded over the last twenty years, and while Executive Director Dawn Broene anticipates more changes are in store for the future, she knows FROM will continue to bring the community together to help each other.

WHEN FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Dawn Broene thinks about the time she's spent at FROM, both as a volunteer and as the leader of the agency since 2014, there are many reasons that she continues to be proud of this dynamic organization. “FROM is meeting the needs of the community with our current programming, but we recognize those needs are changing and we are not afraid to take on some big issues such as housing,” she states. “I am so proud of how the community supports what we are doing which is evident in our growing donations and thrift shop sales, along with successful fundraisers. We couldn't tackle these big issues without the support of this community. Together we can help make a stronger community by helping one person at a time.”

While the services offered at FROM have evolved over the last twenty years to meet a growing list of needs, Dawn anticipates that over the next few years FROM's main focus will be developing Main Street Housing, FROM's housing program. “This is a very new experience for us, but something we are very excited about! This is such a need in

our community and I am so glad that FROM decided to tackle this issue,” she says. FROM will also look at ways to constantly improve services to meet the current needs of the community. “I am excited about some changes we are planning for our Food Pantry. We are in the information gathering phase now, but I know that we will be doing some really great things in the near future pertaining to food and nutrition.”

Dawn acknowledges that the successes and new areas of focus would not be possible without amazing people and a giving community. “FROM's greatest strength is our people and what we do for the community,” she says. “We are known for our programs and how they help those who are in need, but this organization is more than that.”



“ FROM is the place where people can come together and help one another in so many ways. It is the place where you can share your gifts and talents with others. It is the place where you can make friends. It is the place where you can feel that you are part of the community. It is the place where we can see we can do great things together. We truly are the organization that allows Christ's love to be shown through service.” Dawn Broene



FLAT RIVER
OUTREACH
MINISTRIES



OUR MISSION

Flat River Outreach Ministries (FROM) is a non-profit, Christian organization located in Lowell, Michigan. Our mission is to help neighbors in need by walking alongside them; helping them improve their quality of life.

2018 FROM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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