

## Helping Hands

### Markers and Fountain Pens

There is a bulletin board on the wall next to the door to my office. It is the place that notes and letters of support for Stepping Stones — our programs, volunteers, and staff — are posted. In October of 2020, we took them down and Yvonne Nelson, one of our volunteers, scrapbooked them for us. The board was filled again by Christmas. The new batch for 2021 is growing as well.

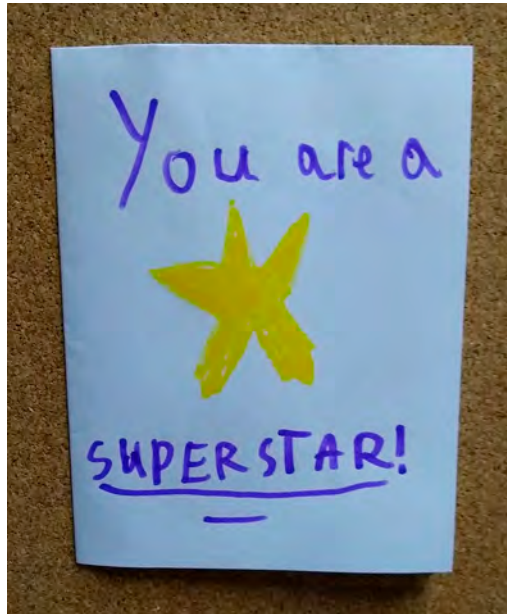
One of my favorites is a hand-drawn card from a child, telling us that we are super stars. Another is a quick note with the shaky script of an aged hand assuring us that better days are coming. There isn't much time currently to take in these gems and appreciate them, but the occasional glance reminds me to take a breath, grab some perspective, and focus on doing what we can.

### Wrenches, Masks and Fish Fries

Sometimes the effort that people put into supporting Stepping Stones and our community is quick and thoughtful. Other times, the contributions are bigger, involving skills, dedication and follow-through. I would like to share some examples of the latter with you as well.



I met Weston Herlache over the phone, when I called the service department at Wisconsin Kenworth for



advice on the program vehicle we were thinking of buying. Before I said goodbye, he told me to call him when we made the purchase. He said that he knew someone that Stepping Stones had helped through a difficult time and wanted to help Stepping Stones in turn.

The truck arrived on a Monday evening — and Weston was looking it over in our parking lot on Tuesday morning. He put his hands and tools on every vital system of the truck and gave us peace of mind that our volunteers and staff would be driving a safe and reliable vehicle.

Shari Johnson had made by hand and given away more than 5,000 Covid masks when she reached out with an idea. She had a new style in mind and wanted to make and sell 500 masks as a fundraising effort for Stepping Stones. Not only were the masks well-designed — some of our staff still wear the masks she made every day — they were also incredibly well received by the community. By the



## Winter 2020-21

time she was done, she raised more than \$2,500 for Stepping Stones' programs.

I received an email from Denny Marach in early January. The Monsignor Blecha Council 2055 Knights of Columbus at St. Joseph's Church had heard that Stepping Stones was having difficulties with funding for emergency shelter, and he had some quick questions.

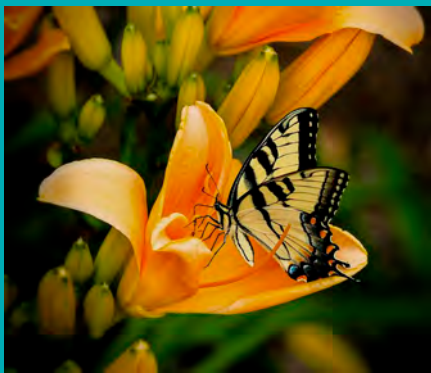
After a brief phone call, Denny stopped by and handed me a \$1,500 check to help pay for emergency hotel stays — funding for more than 20 room nights. He told me that their council had met and decided that although their coffers were short and they couldn't hold fish fries to raise more funds, times like these were the reason that they fundraised in the first place.



### Your hands, too

There are many more examples of people stepping up to contribute to those in need in Dunn County, more hands pitching in than I could cover in 10 times these words. The hands of this community—writing in marker and ink, or turning wrenches, creating masks, and cooking up baskets of fish — have done so much. When we can go to fish fries again, let's make sure that our hands give generously. In the meantime, write someone a note and let them know that you appreciate them. And that better times are coming.

- Padraig Gallagher, Executive Director



## Coming this Summer!

Plans are well underway for the 20th Annual Stepping Stones' Garden Tour!

We were hopeful that this year would find all of us in person in the gardens. But given the uncertain status of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 tour will once again be offered online.

We are delighted to offer 4 amazing gardens to visit virtually from the comfort of your own home – or garden. And we also have some exciting changes this year, including an online auction.

Be on the lookout for more details in the months ahead!

## In the works...



Although Empty Bowls 2021 can't be held in March, the committee is busy working on another plan.

Stay tuned for updates!

## Board News

# Hail ... and Farewell

We extend a warm welcome to this quartet of new faces as they join the 2021 Stepping Stones' Board of Directors.



Loren Barker



Tanya Bruder



Heidi Kotnour



Katie Kramschuster

Our newest board members bring with them a variety of experience and perspective: **Loren Barker** is a retired Lutheran pastor. **Tanya Bruder** is an attorney with Nodolf Flory, LLP. **Heidi Kontour** is a manufacturing manager at 3M's Menomonie plant. **Katie Kramschuster** is a librarian at UW-Stout. We are excited to get to know you!

We also bid a fond good-bye to a trio of board members whose terms expired at the end of December. Attorney Tim Eiden and retired teacher Jay Ivens each completed two terms — that's 6 years — on the board, while Any Felton served for 3 years. Featured on our Facebook page as board member of the month, here's what they had to say about their experience:

**Tim Eiden:** *My time volunteering at Stepping Stones has been a wonderful lesson in how fulfilling and enjoyable service can be.*

**Jay Ivens:** *I enjoy seeing first-hand how the efforts of everyone involved directly impact our community.*

**Andy Felton:** *The mission of Stepping Stones — helping people reach their full potential — closely aligns with my goal as a mental health provider and as an educator.*

Thank you to our outgoing board members for the wealth of time, skills and enthusiasm they so willingly shared with Stepping Stones during their tenure.

A special shout-out goes to former board president Kris Korpela who created a Facebook fundraiser that raised more than \$15,000 to provide funds to house our homeless neighbors in Dunn County in local hotels during the cold winter months.

Find the full roster of our current board members in the sidebar on page 3. To learn more about serving on Stepping Stones' Board of Directors, contact Executive Director Padraig Gallagher at [director@steppingstonesdc.org](mailto:director@steppingstonesdc.org) or call him at 715-235-2920, ext. 2.

# Rolling through a pandemic

When I was hired at Stepping Stones a couple of years ago, my schedule called for me to work five hours a day, four days a week. In my former job as the editor of The Dunn County News, I worked up to 60 hours a week putting out the twice-weekly paper. I felt incredibly lucky to have landed a position where I could share and grow my skills at a more reasonable pace as I slowly sidle toward retirement.

With no available office space, a cozy little corner was created for me next to the retractable wall that separates the conference room from the food pantry's waiting area. Pre-pandemic, the pantry was open at various times Monday through Saturday. To allow me to focus on the job, my 20-hour work week was set up around the times the food pantry was closed.

A couple of days each week, however, there was an hour or two when those times overlapped. As I tapped away on my keyboard, I could hear bits and pieces of conversation coming from the other side of the wall as patrons waited their turn to select what they needed from the fridges, freezers and shelves of groceries and other necessities.

Food pantry regulars warmly greeted each other and often welcomed newcomers, asking them about themselves and exchanging helpful insights and information. News of the day, strong opinions and observations about life in general were shared along with recipes, stories and advice laced with healthy doses of kindness and compassion.

I soon discovered that for many, the pantry not only provided the means to feed their families in a time of need, the camaraderie they found in its waiting room also seemed to feed their spirits.

Then suddenly last March, the pantry doors were closed to all but staff and the volunteers who were still able to help. The COVID-19 pandemic had arrived and along with it, orders to shelter in place. As Stepping Stones quickly shifted gears and introduced curbside pickup, I worried about the patrons for whom visiting the food pantry was also a way to connect with others for a little while.

Fast forward 10 months: Food pantry operations now take place three days a week in the relative safety of the great outdoors. Entering from 17<sup>th</sup> Street, patrons pull up in their vehicle to a remote speaker. Rolling down the window, the driver talks to an intake volunteer stationed inside the building who asks for their name and to see their ID as well as the number of people in their household, whether they receive FoodShare, if they are masked, and whether their trunk is open.



The driver then pulls up to the building where a masked and gloved volunteer waits at the curb. Into the open trunk go bags of assorted groceries packed by staff and volunteers into bins which they hoist onto roller tracks that lead outside.

What was once a hive of lively activity and often happy chatter, the walls of the food pantry operation are pretty quiet these days. Most of the staff, along with a handful of volunteers, make sure Stepping Stones can continue to feed those in need and that everyone can stay as safe as possible.

We recognize that “social distancing” is now an established part of the vernacular. Thanks to grants and generous financial help, we've been able to feed people's bodies so far. All we can do is hope that it helps to feed their spirits as well.

*Barbara Lyon is the development and communications specialist for Stepping Stones of Dunn County. Contact her at [development@steppingstonesdc.org](mailto:development@steppingstonesdc.org)*

## Stepping Stones Board of Directors

Sara Carstens, President  
Jerry Porter, Vice President  
Heather Wigdahl, Secretary  
Mark Kalscheur, Treasurer  
Loren Barker  
Tanya Bruder  
Kamsey Keyes Cleveland  
Bev Deyo-Svendsen  
Michelle Kloser  
Heidi Kotnour  
Nina Koch  
Kate Kramschuster  
Nichole Manson  
Karen Miller  
Wendy Slaback

## Staff

Padraig Gallagher  
Executive Director

Kris Pawlowski  
Assistant Director &  
Food Pantry Coordinator

Heidi Hooten  
Stepping Stones Shelter  
Program Coordinator

Jill Seichter  
Community Connections  
Program Coordinator

Barbara Lyon  
Part-time Development &  
Communications Specialist

Mai Nou Hang  
Program Assistant

Henry Amberson  
Part-time Maintenance &  
Warehouse Manager

Patty Wright, Mike Racette  
Part-time Warehouse Mgrs.

## In 2020, the pantry:

- ◆ Distributed >1 million lbs. of food
- ◆ Averaged 1,634 monthly visits, serving 3,56 people
- ◆ Food insecurity in Dunn County increased 66%
- ◆ Semi-monthly pop-up pantries in 4 Dunn County communities averaged 200 household visits



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Or Current Resident



**Look Inside to See How We're Stepping Up Together!**

# Stimulate Good!

What can **\$600** do for your community?

Let **Stepping Stones** do the math:

**\$600 =**

**8** nights out of the cold

**+**

**400** meals

Seeking refuge from winter's chill

In 2020, Stepping Stones provided 6,287 nights of shelter. And courtesy of COVID-19, it seems 2021 is on track to *ADD* up to even more of the same!

Winter Haven was not able to open for the 2020-21 season. Instead, homeless individuals who once found refuge there are currently being put up for short stays at several local motels at discounted rates.

Whatever you can give truly *ADDS* up to make such a big difference! *Visit us at [www.steppingstonesdc.org](http://www.steppingstonesdc.org) or on Facebook to learn more.*