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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Largest Serving Food Pantry In Iowa Experiences Record Breaking March Numbers due to COVID-19

April 2, 2020: Bidwell Riverside Center's food pantry, a DMARC (Des Moines Area Religious Council) partner pantry, experienced a 31% increase in the number of individuals served in March, totaling 4,329 people.

March is normally a slow month for the Food & Clothing Pantry because many people are receiving their tax refunds and can purchase their food rather than receive it from us. However, many of the clients we have served recently have been let go from their retail and restaurant jobs indefinitely due to all of the closings, have more mouths to feed since their children are home from school, or are just simply worried about where they are going to get their next meal from, especially with all of the shortages happening at grocery stores.

In the first week of implementing the governor's COVID-19 recommendations (March 16 - 20), Bidwell served 1,386 people in the Food & Clothing Pantry, a 29% increase from last year. During the second week (March 23 - 27) Bidwell served 1,157 people, a 5% increase from last year. Since clients can only come in for emergency food every 10 days, we're expecting to see a larger increase this week. During these two weeks, the Food & Clothing Pantry has been operating with half of our staff and about 5% of our volunteers.

We have changed our entire operation and intake process in order to minimize exposure and implement social distancing:

- We are now closing an hour earlier on Tuesday nights and are not open on Saturday due to staffing and volunteer shortages. Hours of operation can be found here: bidwellriverside.org/food-and-clothing-pantry
- We now do curbside service, meaning no clients come in the pantry. Clients stay in their car or wait at our picnic tables (if they don't have a car) to be served in response to social distancing.
- Our staff completes the intake process through the car window or at a safe distance. Once the intake process is completed, we will then bring the household's food package.

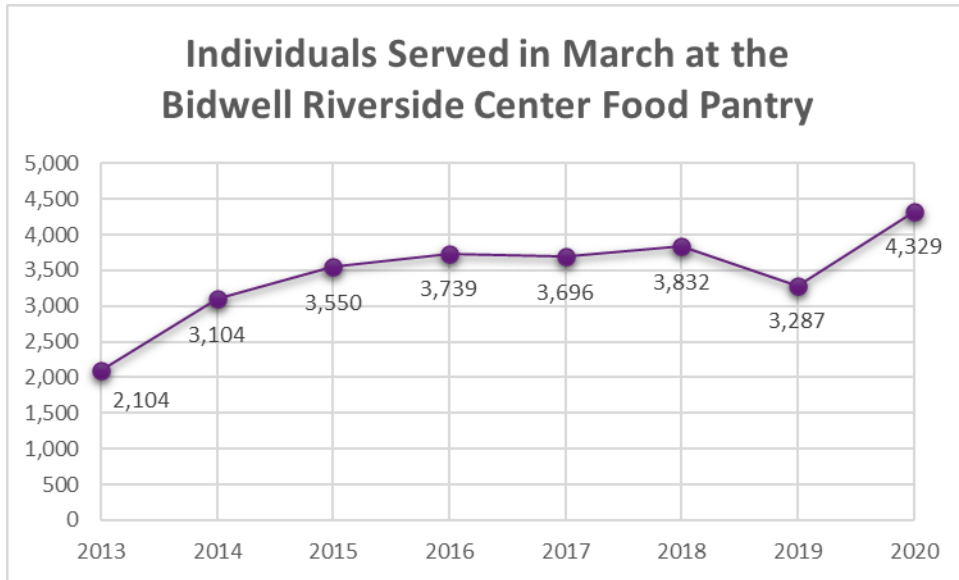
Our donation process has also changed to minimize exposure:

- We are currently only accepting food, toiletry, diapers, baby wipes, baby food, and plastic bags and boxes as donations. We are not taking any clothing or household donations as clients cannot come in and shop.
- Donations are to be placed in the trunk, hatch, or back seat. A member of the pantry staff or volunteer will come out and grab the donations without contact/exposure.

Financial contributions are the easiest way to help Bidwell right now – you can donate by visiting: bidwellriverside.org/donate

Since 1893, Bidwell Riverside Center has existed to help struggling families meet their basic needs so they can become self-sufficient and ultimately, break the cycle of poverty. The pantry is a one-stop-shop for essential needs: diapers, baby food, clothing, toiletries, and household goods. All of this, as well as food, is available for free to anyone who walks through the doors. Last year, Bidwell distributed approximately 130,000 clothing items, 42,000 diapers, 3,700 units of baby formula or food, and 32,000 toiletry items. Access to food, toiletries, diapers, baby food, formula, clothing, and household items is vital to those living in poverty, and the need is not subsiding.

Bidwell is one of fourteen pantries that operate under the Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC) umbrella and provides a food supply meant to sustain families for a three-day period. Clients can receive this three-day supply once per calendar month. Emergency food is purchased by Bidwell or provided through the generous donations of area residents and can be accessed by families every ten days.



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