



## IowaWINS Spring 2021 News

Many thanks to all the people and organizations who have donated and continue to donate money and goods to support the IowaWINS families. Your gifts have and continue to make a significant difference to these families in need. Please consider becoming a sustainable member of IowaWINS - with a regular monthly donation in an amount that fits your budget. This will help us be able to plan for our ongoing programs, especially our Food pantry.

### **May 9th will be 3rd Anniversary of the ICE Raid in Mount Pleasant**

May 9, 2018, was an ordinary day for most citizens of Mount Pleasant, but at a local cement factory, a helicopter circled overhead and law enforcement vehicles surrounded the perimeter as ICE carried out a raid of the facility, rounded up about 45 Hispanic employees, loaded them into vans, and carried them off to various holding facilities.

All of the detainees were men, the main breadwinners for their families. This was no longer an ordinary day for these men or for their wives and children who were suddenly stricken with fear and distress. None of the detainees was subsequently charged with crimes other than the few who had previously been deported and who had unlawfully returned to the U.S. Those men were deported for the second time.

The rest of the men have been reunited with their families and continue to await immigration hearings to establish their status. IowaWINS continues to partner with these families as they seek to support themselves through these challenging times.

# Alex's Story

by Trey Hegar, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Mt Pleasant

Alex was born in Guatemala. At the age of 10, he walked, with his Mother and younger sister, to the United States to join his grandfather in Iowa. His mother has not been seen for several years now. It is assumed she was deported - ICE does not have to notify anyone in a family when someone is taken into their custody and removed from the country.

Alex and his sister remained living with their grandfather until 2018, when ICE raided the concrete factory in Mt. Pleasant, where he worked. His grandfather was detained and awaited a hearing for bail. Alex and his sister were left alone. They were 13 and 15 years old. A distant aunt stepped in to help temporarily. Alex and his sister remained at their grandfather's house, going to school and doing the best they could until their grandfather was released and given a work permit.



Alex began to work odd jobs to earn money. He told Pastor Trey "...you have to work to eat and if you want stuff. That's how the world is..."

Alex is now almost 17. He paid for his own legal fees to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status - and, his application was approved. He earned enough money to buy his own small, red car which, like many adolescent boys, is his pride and joy

Alex has worked hard, saved money, learned the legal system, paid for a lawyer and court fees and bought his own car. Then he got a phone call - his special juvenile asylum sponsor would no longer be able to act as his legal guardian because of a terminal illness.

Sad enough as that situation was - it would now cost hundreds of dollars in court and lawyer fees to amend the sponsorship with a new legal guardian. Alex was devastated. This new, sad situation was costly. It would take a lot of time and work for him to save up enough money.

Alex knew that IowaWINS had helped his younger sister because Trey is her legal guardian. Trey told Alex that IowaWINS could also help with his legal fees if the Leadership approved. At first, Alex didn't want to ask for help. "Call it pride," he said. He wanted to do this on his own. Finally, when Trey said he would ask on Alex's behalf, he hesitantly accepted.

The IowaWINS Leadership approved helping with Alex's legal fees, \$541.67, to change his legal guardian for special immigrant juvenile status. Imagine how long it would have taken Alex to save that much money - at the age of 16, going to school, and working part-time. Now this young man can spend his hard-earned money on something other than a lawyer and court fees. Freedom shouldn't be so costly! Your generous support allowed IowaWINS to help Alex and is allowing us to help other immigrants as needs arise.

## IowaWINS Food Pantry Operation

by Bob Mueller, Food Pantry Coordinator

Over the last three years that the food pantry has been in operation to serve immigrant families in the Mt Pleasant area, we have learned a lot about the value they bring to our community. From agriculture, to healthcare, to manufacturing, to special projects like building the Iowa Fertilizer Plant, they contribute significantly to Iowa's economy.

Coming out of the crisis after the ICE raid at the MCP Enterprises Cement Plant in 2018, and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have gone through several metamorphoses to meet the continuing needs of families - as they have no safety net.

The days after the ICE raid brought an amazing influx of food, toiletries, and clothing. The First Presbyterian Church of Mt Pleasant was the drop off location and provided the room for our new IowaWINS Food Pantry. We signed up the families affected by the ICE raid for this Food pantry so they could select from these donated items. There was an initial level of distrust - as contact between our communities had been limited - but the Food pantry became the catalyst that built the bond of trust and respect for each other.

During that first year, we settled into a routine of opening the Food pantry every other Monday morning. As the immigrant families selected from among donated items, we learned that many of the foods we considered staples of our daily diet, were not part of these families' diets. Canned soups, canned vegetables, and packaged foods were passed by. Canned fruit, beans, rice, spaghetti, and cereals went quickly.



We soon found that we were not able to provide consistency of selection, from just donated items, for the number of families coming to the Food pantry.

By the second year, we started using a wholesaler to provide 'in demand' basic items in the quantities we needed to have a consistent inventory. And we encouraged people to donate money instead of food items so we could purchase exactly what the families used. Boxes of black beans, bags of rice and sugar, canned pineapple and peaches, cooking oil, and laundry detergent

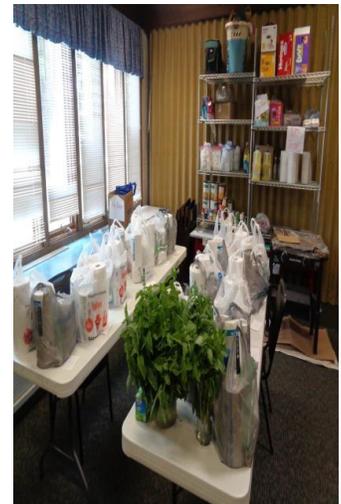
became a regular order. We would repackage these items at the pantry so each family would get a portion come pantry day. Eventually, we learned that some nationalities preferred white rice to brown rice, pinto beans to black beans, etc., so we made more adjustments to our orders. As the months went by, we noticed that the number of families using the food pantry



started to decline as the men got work permits and families became more stabilized. Where we once served up to 30 families, by early 2020, we were serving around 12 families.

Then the COVID pandemic hit! We started seeing more families returning to use the pantry as working conditions were affected. In addition, there were families affected by the pandemic who were not part of our regular group from the ICE raid. To meet the situation, our numbers suddenly grew from around 12 families to over 40 families. And, as our numbers grew, so did our expenses.

Because of the COVID pandemic, we could no longer have the families come into the Food pantry to make their selections. We started giving out gift cards so the families could do their own shopping. We shifted from a “Walk-In” food pantry to a “Drive-Up” Food pantry. The families would drive into the Church parking lot and we would bring them the gift cards –reducing contact to a minimum.



We then discovered that the pandemic created another problem – shortage of paper products (remember the run on toilet paper!). So, we contacted our wholesaler to purchase paper towels and toilet paper in the quantities to serve our families. Problem solved! We also purchased laundry soap and cooking oil. These, along with the paper products, can have a large impact on the family food budget so, providing these, along with the gift cards, really helped the families in these trying times.

In the second year, we also began providing fresh produce that our Sustaining Ministry – Nutrimos – grown in their plots at the Fellowship Cup Community Gardens and from a local farm. These immigrant families are used to cooking with fresh produce - that is one of the reasons they let canned vegetables sit on the shelf. They now can look forward to foods they are used to come summer. They are also provided with seeds and plants for their home gardens or their own Community Garden plots, along with fresh produce from the Nutrimos plots in the Community Garden as part of the Nutrimos ‘We Nourish’ program.

We have now settled into this hybrid model where we hand out basic household items, along with the gift card, on a drive-up basis every other Monday. We spend approximately \$5,100 each month to provide \$50 HyVee gift cards and household products to 41 families. We all know that doesn’t cover the costs of food for a family, but it is a significant help to keeping food on the table. The need is still there. And the families constantly profess their gratitude for the services IowaWINs provides.

## **In Closing – We Really Appreciate Your Help!**

Along with Grants that we can secure, your donations greatly help us in our efforts. We are a totally volunteer non-profit organization - so every dollar you donate goes directly to help these immigrant families in need.

We will continue to provide services as long as we have funds. If you are able to become a sustaining member of IowaWINS, providing a monthly donation, at whatever level is comfortable for you, this will allow us to be able to plan for our ongoing programs, especially our Food pantry. Thank you so much for whatever support you are able to provide.

Sincerely,

**Tammy Shull**

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## **OUR VISION:**

Our communities will be inclusive and hospitable, welcoming people from across the world who chose to live, work, study and seek happiness here.

The purpose of IowaWINS is to establish a connection between immigrant families and other Mount Pleasant and Southeast Iowa neighbors.

In order to achieve that vision, the MISSION of IowaWINS is to:

- Develop relationships and partnerships within our communities and beyond to develop and implement solutions to common problems that immigrant residents face.
- Support the self-development of people in the immigrant community through connecting groups seeking to take initiative with resources.
- Build inclusive and hospitable relationships, providing educational, cultural, and service opportunities for all members of the community.
- Support children and people who came to the US as children in seeking to establish legal status in the US through assistance with application and legal fees to the degree possible with resources available.
- Advocate on behalf of immigrant rights to Iowa residents, government officials, office seekers and those developing public policy.