May 22, 2019

2019 BPC Women of Influence Nominating Committee

Des Moines Business Record

Dear Nominating Committee,

Sarai Schnucker Rice is well known throughout Iowa and the nation as a leader in providing healthy food to the food insecure. As Executive Director of Des Moines Area Religious Council (“DMARC”) for the past eleven years, she has transformed the mission of the organization from providing surplus food to providing and promoting healthy food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, to the food insecure. Under Sarai’s leadership, DMARC has been recognized nationally as an innovative leader by providing a more well-rounded approach to serving the food insecure.

Under Sarai’s leadership, DMARC started gathering data from all clients of each member pantry. This data helps to drive decision-making regarding placement of pantries (eliminating food deserts) and provides critical usage data across the entire pantry network. Mapping software is utilized to map where clients live compared to pantry locations and bus routes. The mapping software can also provide summarized usage information by city council district, Iowa congressional districts, and city limits. It is a powerful tool in showing the food insecure come from all over Central Iowa and which areas have the highest growth in the food insecure.

Sarai also drove DMARC from just providing surplus food to providing healthy food alternatives. The food insecure have a higher rate of type 2 diabetes. Instead of just providing food, DMARC began to focus on providing healthy food alternatives. One of DMARC’s pantries utilizes a point system that promotes clients to choose healthier food alternatives. This Food Pantry 2.0 program has been nationally recognized as an innovative approach to driving healthy food choices.

Through Sarai’s leadership, the community has generously responded to the need of the food insecure. DMARC’s support of local food pantries has grown significantly in the past 11 years. By providing healthy food options, DMARC is helping to improve the health of the food insecure. Donors have positively responded to this more well-rounded approach in serving the food insecure.

All these efforts could not have been done by only DMARC, Sarai is a strong collaborator in working closely with other non-profit organizations, religious organizations, United Way, Community Foundation, local governments, and Federal agencies. By working together on common issues related to food insecurity, the community has benefited through the development of common goals and more cost effective programs to serve the food insecure.

I have been an active board member in the Des Moines area for more than 20 years. I have had the pleasure of working with many dedicated Executive Directors both at the local and national level. Sarai is the best Executive Director that I have ever worked with. She is an excellent strategic planner. She is always pushing the organization to improve. She has a strong understanding of financial management. She is an excellent coach, mentor and supervisor. She is well respected by her peers and community leaders.

I fully endorse the nomination of Sarai Schnucker Rice for the 2019 BPC Women of Influence award in recognition of Sarai’s efforts in providing for the food insecure of Central Iowa.

Sincerely,

Thomas W. Cross

Vice President and Chief Financial Officer