



“Boots on the Ground” – Special Event, Coralville Parks & Recreation Matt Hibbard, Recreation Center Supervisor

It's no secret that parks and recreation is about more than simply giving people opportunities to play and be active. The role of parks and recreation in building and sustaining healthy, livable communities goes well beyond sports, games and playgrounds. In Coralville, we strive to connect our Parks and Recreation Department with the community in a variety of ways through partnerships and special events that will benefit the community as a whole.

One of the organizations we work with on a regular basis is the Coralville Family Resource Center, a local non-profit organization supported by the school district, the city of Coralville, and by donations. The Family Resource Center provides many valuable services to Coralville families, particularly those in need. This time of year, one of their most valuable services is to provide winter outerwear to children whose families are unable to provide those things. Demand has been great this year, and the Family Resource Center's supplies were depleted.

On Friday, January 18, the Coralville Parks and Recreation Department hosted an event called **“Boots on the Ground,”** a winter clothing drive for the Family Resource Center. The idea for this event came from discussions between Amy Faulkner and myself. It started as simply a coffeehouse type event for families, featuring local music and coffee from local shops. After hearing from staff at the Coralville Family Resource Center that they had exhausted their supply of winter boots and coats, Amy suggested that our event could be a benefit for the Family Resource Center.

We talked to the staff from the Family Resource Center, who were immediately behind the idea so we got the ball rolling. We settled on the name **“Boots on the Ground”** to tie in the winter clothing drive and coffeehouse aspects of the event. Popular local blues musician Kevin “BF” Burt was quickly on board as well.

After many hours of planning, preparing and promoting, the date finally came. The weather couldn't have been more appropriate! Temperatures hovered just above zero, with the wind blowing fiercely. We were concerned that the weather would keep people away, but it seemed to emphasize just how much that winter outerwear was needed.

The turnout was fantastic for a first-time event. We estimate between 150-200 people came out over the course of the evening. Four local coffee shops donated hot beverages, cups, napkins and their time, and a local bank donated desserts. The music was great, and everyone really enjoyed themselves. Admission to the event was just one item of winter outerwear per person, but at the end of the night we had a truckload of coats, hats, boots, snow pants, mittens and gloves, many of which were brand new.

Sometimes it seems like we get too hung up on expenses versus revenues, ways we can benefit our own department, increasing participation in our programs, etc. It's easy to overlook the ways in which we can benefit our community. **Boots on the Ground** is a great example of how our department can work with other organizations in a mutually beneficial way. Partnerships like these will ultimately benefit us as well, and in the meantime, it's a great feeling to know we've helped keep some kids warm this winter.

Boots on the Ground donations:

56 winter coats

25 lightweight coats and jackets

30 pairs of gloves and mittens

31 hats

14 pairs of ear muffs

27 scarves

10 pairs of snow pants

18 pairs of boots

211 items total!