Making Every Day “The Best Day”

By Cyndi Miller, Executive Director

We often receive heartfelt notes from our client families. We post them on the bulletin board in the copy room so that volunteers and staff alike may enjoy reading the encouraging words of those we serve. Today, in preparation for these paragraphs, I plucked a few off the board to read in my office. Hidden beneath one of the notes was a tiny card with a simple but powerful sentiment: “Thank you so very much. For me, this is the best day of every month. Thanks for what you do.”

Reflecting on this past year, I try to imagine how all that we do impacts the lives of our client families.

Each month we welcomed 600 or more households into our facility to shop in our client choice pantry. Through monthly case management appointments, we invited each to partake in other programs and services at Circle; like Back to School, Birthday Club and holiday programs, career mentoring, counseling, kids’ camps, and college scholarships. Some sought emergency support through our rent and utility assistance program.

Because we often intervene when a family is at risk of eviction, we worked this year to bolster our understanding of housing resources, through partnership in the St. Louis County Continuum of Care. To support other agencies that help with housing, our staff participated in the Point in Time Count, a HUD-required effort to literally count the homeless individuals on a given day within a specific geographic area. We met with community leaders throughout the year to share our thoughts on policies that help (or hurt) the families we serve.

As we head to the holidays, we prepare for our busiest season. Our Thanksgiving Basket and Holiday Adoption events will serve 500 households!

Continued on page 2
A Year in the Life,
cont. from front cover

We drafted a catastrophic flood plan so that we could continue to serve families if flood waters should ever breach the Valley Park levee (God forbid!) Our volunteers and staff assisted new families through the federal government shut-down.

We welcomed and trained new volunteers, and said goodbye to some beloved Circle friends.

Fundraising makes this work possible. In partnership with St. Mark Presbyterian Church we held a sold-out golf event in May; and a committee of Circle volunteers led our September Trivia Night to new heights. Monthly newsletters, numerous grant proposals and two annual appeals helped to raise the dollars needed to serve client families and keep our facility running.

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As the client I mentioned earlier thanks us for what we do, we thank YOU for helping to make her visit to Circle “the best day of every month.” May your season be bright!

Jazz Bunch

Turkey thawing in the fridge? Check!
Pies cooling on the rack? Check!
Plans made to attend the 5th annual Genesis Jazz Project concert benefiting Circle on Tuesday, November 26? Check it out!

Plan to kick off your holiday weekend with the hottest – and coolest – ticket in town, listening to some of St. Louis’s best jazz musicians play old standards and new arrangements. For the third year, Genesis Jazz will be joined by up-and-coming talent with the Lafayette High School jazz band. A donation of food or money will get you in the door. Here are the details, and we’ll see you on the 26th!

What: Benefit Jazz Concert
Who: Genesis Jazz Project & Lafayette High School Jazz Band
When: Tuesday, November 26 at 7 p.m.
Where: Lafayette High School, 17050 Clayton Road in Wildwood
How Much: 5 cans of food or suggested donation of $10

Before Sunset

The Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit program is scheduled by statute to end, or sunset, on December 31 of this year. Gifts of money and food given through New Year’s Eve will still qualify for these valuable and easy-to-access 50 percent tax credits.

Please give generously before the end of the year. Contact cyndi@circleofconcern.org or juliet@circleofconcern.org for more information.
What does it take to inspire a group to give? Our good friends at Distribution Management, or DM, are among many at companies, schools, churches and clubs that conduct big food drives for us. They can tell you exactly what it takes!

• According to DM’s Megan and Misty, a successful food drive begins with lots of communication and good leadership. Staff leaders who engage their work groups, motivate the team with contests or other incentives (dress-down days and manager car washes are a big hit!) and keep everyone’s eyes on the prize of a big haul of food.

• The logistics of the drive are important. A short one-to-two week drive (preceded by a few weeks of email notices) prevents procrastination and keeps everyone engaged. Keeping the collection visible (DM collected in their lobby) and posting a daily tally or food count builds excitement for meeting the collection goal.

• Finally, DM used creativity throughout the drive to keep things interesting. A few of their ideas were a dance video, staff members dressed up as food items, and even a water bucket over a manager’s head when a key goal was reached!

Megan and Misty urge other companies and groups to have some fun and do some good by conducting a food drive for Circle. They’ve seen first-hand how the activity builds morale, engages all team members and directly benefits families in our community.
Make a Family’s Dream Come True

We still have families awaiting adopting by community sponsors – individuals, families, churches, businesses and others. Circle’s Holiday Adoption program pairs Circle families with sponsors to help with gifts in December. Will you help by adopting? We recommend an expenditure of up to $50 per person in the household, and we’ll even provide you with a wish list to shop from!

Contact arozar46@gmail.com or visit circleofconcern.org to sign up as a sponsor today.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of an organization that helps the community I grew up in. No one plans to need a place like Circle of Concern, and it takes a lot of humility to admit you need help and then even more to go one step further and ask for it. One of the most frequent things I hear from our new clients is, “I never thought I would be here, I never thought I would need you guys.” I am thankful that we are here to respond with kindness and understanding, with an individualized, evidence-based approach, with care, compassion and empathy…. and to help our clients reassemble those pieces when their world feels shattered by an unexpected crisis or disaster.

~ Niki Vandable,
Client Services Director

6 Tips for Less-Stress Holidays

The busiest months of the year have arrived. Here are six ways to manage and enter 2020 with a sense of calm:

1. **Sleep** – There’s a lot to dazzle the eyes right now, but make firm plans to close them and rest. Give yourself a bedtime and stick to it whenever you can.

2. **Eat a Vegetable** – …or two. Chocolate, sugar and alcohol may seem like entire food groups during the holidays, but deciding to eat healthy dishes first will give you the energy you need to enjoy the fun and sample the sweet stuff.

3. **Walk** – More time commitments may prevent a normal exercise routine, but even short walks every day to look at leaves and Christmas lights will keep your system in the game.

4. **Say NO** – …or at least “Not yet.” Perhaps easier said than done, limiting your social calendar or holiday commitments gives you the chance to relax and enjoy what matters most to you. Make plans with friends after the first of the year to extend the social season.

5. **The B-Word** – If part of your holiday stress comes from anticipating January bills, there’s no avoiding the wisdom of setting a Budget and sticking to it. If you frequent local businesses, consider shopping with cash. Or ask the gift recipients exactly what they want…and just buy that instead of an array of last-minute finds. Or give to a local charity like Circle of Concern in honor of your friend or loved one. We will send the friend a notification that they inspired a gift to help others in our community, and you can receive the benefit of Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credits. Visit circleofconcern.org.

6. **Take Care of YOU** – All of the preceding tips and many more contribute to the old adage – help yourself first so you can help others. Simple decorating, comfortable entertaining, holiday movie nights at home, using that bath bomb given by your granddaughter and so much more refresh you to take on 2020 with energy and purpose!
Are You 70 ½ with an IRA?

If your answer to that question is “Yes,” you probably know you must take a Required Minimum Distribution from that IRA this year. If you haven’t done so yet, please consider taking that distribution as a Qualified Charitable Distribution with a gift to Circle. You’ll get credit for the gift without it being counted as taxable income. Talk to your financial advisor today for information on making a QCD!

Campership Notes

The benefits of summer camp experiences are many, according to the American Camp Association, including honing teamwork, leadership, creative and practical skills. Those are just a few of the benefits enjoyed by the 111 children who had fun this summer through Circle’s Campership program. Thank you to all who make this possible for Circle kids!

“...she is still playing volleyball. She just made the school team!”

“He passed the swim test!”

“They learned to do back handsprings.”

“Learned Spanish while playing sports.”

“She came home more confident, like a leader.”

“He really likes playing soccer; it’s his favorite sport.”

“He came in second place in the 100 and 200 meter relay.”

“She learned measuring and baking skills and how to make frosting.”

E-Commerce = Easy Contributions

After spreading the word that the food pantry was critically low on pasta sauce and noodles, friends brought us nearly 2,500 pounds of these needed items! One of the donations came in the form of an Amazon delivery, with a kind note from “Crystal.”

Online shopping services make giving to Circle easy. Retail giants can ship right to Circle or, on the local front, services like Shipt or Instacart will go to the grocery store and deliver foods right to us. All this can happen from the comfort of your own computer!

As the upcoming holiday season gets busy, please consider using online options to help stock Circle’s pantry shelves with much-needed items. All you’ll need is our address – 112 St. Louis Avenue, Valley Park, 63088 – and when we’re open to take deliveries (look at the back of this newsletter). Thank you for clicking Send!

Give at circleofconcern.org
What’s Cookin’ at Circle

Rebecca Pool, a Dietetic Technology practicum student working at Circle this fall, has a special interest in nutrition. As a result, she’s making a big impact in the food pantry introducing our clients to new foods and sharing healthy recipes made from the groceries Circle shares. She even prepared a handy recipe guide to place in our Thanksgiving Baskets for clients new to preparing a holiday feast. Here’s a quick taste!

Recipe

Cranberry Jello Salad

Serves 20

ingredients
- 2 3-ounce packages of strawberry gelatin
- 2 cups boiling water
- 10-ounce package of frozen strawberries
- 14-ounce can of cranberry sauce
- 1 cup celery, thinly sliced
- ½ cup chopped pecans (optional)

directions
In a large glass or plastic mixing bowl, combine gelatin and boiling water; stir until completely dissolved. Let cool in refrigerator for 15 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours or until firm.

Awards Programs

When grocery shopping or chasing down the perfect holiday gift, please remember retailers that give a portion of sales to Circle of Concern. Purchases made through the Amazon Smile and Schnucks eScrip programs both can benefit Circle. Please ask your other favorite retailers if they will do the same!

Thank You!

Many thanks to students at Parkway South High School for 393 food items they collected for Circle! Sarah D. organized the drive. Sarah—pictured with Circle board member, Dolores Rodenberg—takes her philanthropy seriously as the vice president of Philanthropy for the Student Council!

Reverse Advent Calendar

To enter the true spirit of Christmas, try a Reverse Advent Calendar. Each day through Advent, collect a nonperishable food item. Bring all the foods to Circle by 3pm on December 23 to stock the shelves into winter. Merry Christmas!

Food Pantry Tax Credit

The Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit will sunset on December 31 of this year. Please plan to give now to ensure you get these valuable tax credits. Have questions? Contact juliet@circleofconcern.org.
To Circle By Way Of...

I’m so grateful for the end of new clients’ first visits to Circle. When people walk into Circle needing help the first time, they often look broken...shell-shocked, even, in disbelief that a food pantry is the only option to feed the family. At the end of the visits, though, after facing the current need and hearing all Circle can do to help, after walking through the pantry to choose good, wholesome food for their families, our new clients walk out with their heads high and maybe a bit of hope that things are going to be OK.
~ Juliet Holden,
Sr. Director of Resource Development

A new client recently came to Circle, a divorced mother of a high school-aged boy. She’s lived here for 10 years, since moving from Uzbekistan (a former Soviet bloc country) with her husband. When the marriage ended and her spouse returned home, she struggled to make ends meet in this place she now considers home.

One day, her mother back in Uzbekistan was flipping through videos on YouTube and came across a Circle of Concern video of Michelle, our pantry director, showing what foods we share. When she realized her daughter practically lives right in our back yard, she lit up the phone lines and urged her daughter to call us.

She did, she qualifies for our services and Circle will help this proud mom get back on her feet. All by way of Uzbekistan, 6,752 miles away.

Tree Lot Treasure

Families in the market for the perfect fresh Christmas tree flock to one of our favorite tree lots! The Men’s Group of Manchester United Methodist sells beautiful trees and seasonal greenery...and a portion of the proceeds benefits Circle!

Stop by the popular tree lot at 14374 Manchester Road (just west of Hwy. 141) from November 29 to December 23 (or until the trees run out).


Please consider a year-end gift to the Food Pantry. Your investment fills hungry bellies and relieves so much worry.
Circle of Concern
FOOD PANTRY
112 St. Louis Ave.
Valley Park, MO 63088
Address Service Requested

We share many donations with our clients:
- Food, Canned and Packaged
- Fresh Garden Produce
- Dry Pet Food, Litter
- New School Supplies
- New Blankets, Hats, Gloves

Donations are accepted:
- Mon, Tue, Fri.................... 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- Wednesday ..................... 9 a.m. - 7 p.m.
- Thursday ....................... 9 a.m. - noon
- Saturday....................... 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Important Dates:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 20</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Food Drop-Off Deadline at Circle</td>
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<td>November 21</td>
<td>Old Newsboys Day</td>
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<td>November 23</td>
<td>Open for Donations, Clients Pick Up</td>
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<td>November 26</td>
<td>Genesis Jazz Project Concert</td>
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<td>November 27</td>
<td>Circle closed for Thanksgiving Weekend</td>
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<td>December 10</td>
<td>Holiday Adoption Gifts Drop-Off</td>
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<td>December 16</td>
<td>Board of Directors Meeting at Circle, 5:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>December 24-25</td>
<td>Circle closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 26-27</td>
<td>Circle open 9:00 to 12:00 noon</td>
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STAFF DIRECTORY

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