The Only Way is Through...

When every normal path in life looks different than it used to, with uncertainty around each corner, the road can look pretty dark. For many of us, we’re on that bleak stretch of road right now, thanks to the current pandemic.

Not one of us is alone on that road. And many of us are feeling the impact and stressors caused by what’s happening. Sleeplessness, fear of getting sick, worry over finances, increased substance use, anxiety over exposure of essential workers, depression from social isolation, sadness over missed milestones, the inability to plan for the future, worries for the health of those around you, generalized feelings of sadness and fear – these are all common responses.

"Some subtler things are going on, too," says Niki Vandable, LCSW, Circle of Concern’s Client Services Director and a licensed clinical social worker. "Prolonged exposure to this type of stress causes your brain and body to go into ‘survival’ mode. Your brain is temporarily diverting your energy to staying alive and to adjusting in our constantly changing world. You are also likely grieving the loss of normalcy, and thus flowing in and out of various stages of grief."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, coping with stress in healthy ways will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. Here are some key tips:

- Start with your own body – deep breaths and regular stretching, along with healthy meals, adequate sleep, exercise and limited alcohol and drug use keep you primed to handle temporary stressors.

- Connect with others every day – video or text chats, a phone call, 2-sided tic tac toe on a glass door or a properly distanced driveway-to-driveway conversation remind us we’re not alone in the darkest times.

A generous grant from the Chiron Fund of the St. Louis Community Foundation is helping our clients address mental health challenges during these difficult times. Thank you!

The Only Way is Through... Current Needs:

- Cereal
- Canned Pasta
- Detergent
- Shampoo
- Conditioner
- Toilet Paper
- Lotion
- Razors
A Note from Cyndi

One day last week, I picked up my phone to hear a heartfelt message from a new client.

“This is Barbara ______. I picked up food today at your place, and I want to thank you. There are not enough words...I just really felt a relief, like something heavy just came off my back...thank you, thank you so much. God bless you all.”

What an affirming message. That this individual, with all that she’s juggling, with all her concerns...she took the time to say, in essence “thank you – you made a difference for me. I feel hopeful now.”

The Covid-19 Pandemic has delivered a year like no other. We cannot know now the long-lasting impact of lost loved ones, forced (but necessary) isolation and distancing, remote schooling, missed milestones and shuttered businesses. We cannot possibly know the trauma that so many healthcare workers have endured. While there is much to be grateful for, there is much uncertainty. When will this end?

The federal relief dollars, in the form of stimulus payments and enhanced unemployment support, seemed to have helped those most affected by the economic shut down. While we had a spike in the numbers of clients seeking support in March – April. May and June showed a leveling off. Now, as those federal benefits taper off, and yet more companies furlough or fold, our numbers are beginning to increase.

Your support—especially during this time—is so very appreciated. Because you give food and funds to support our work, Barbara and others like her can feel the weight lifted – they can get the help they need. You bring help and hope to our friends and neighbors. Together, we will get through this difficult time. My best wishes for your safety and continued good health!

Gratefully,

Cyndi

A Client Story

Our volunteer, Shirley, rolled a cart full of groceries out to a client’s car at curbside, observing safe distancing as she placed the food into the trunk. She was close enough, though, for the client to see each item as it was moved from cart to car. As she worked, Shirley could hear our client squeal, “Oh my goodness, she’s giving us a cantaloupe! Do you see that pineapple?! A whole box of fruit and veggies?! I can’t believe it!”

As the client pulled away from the curb, Shirley heard a voice float out of the driver’s window, “Tell everyone ‘thank you, thank you, thank you!’”

Holiday Adoption, 2020 Style!

At this writing, temperatures hover around 90 degrees. Therefore, Circle is preparing for December!

In 2019, our Holiday Adoption program provided holiday gifts to nearly 600 families – 1,800 individuals in all! Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty of the coming months, we made the decision to cancel our traditional gift drop-off and pick-up two-day event. However, we still want to share the joy of the holidays with our client families. We plan to do this by sharing gift cards – a $50 card for each family member. Therefore, while we may miss the fun of shopping for our adopted families, our client families will now have the opportunity to shop for, and choose, their own gifts. The cards will be distributed in a festive one-day, curbside event in December.

The number of people we’re serving has increased a bit since last year, so the estimate to provide a gift card to each individual we serve is $100,000. Would you like to help us reach this goal and provide a warm and bright holiday season for families who rely on Circle? Just let us know how many people you’d like to adopt, at $50 per person, and note “Holiday Adoption” on the memo line of your gift. Or click the Donate Now button at circleofconcern.org and write Holiday Adoption in the Tribute Name field.

Thank you for being the best of the season for Circle families!
Thank U
Among our team of devoted volunteers this summer, we’ve welcomed an eager college crew. Thanks for serving with us!

Feast Facts
Turkey, pie and seasonal groceries are still on the Thanksgiving Basket menu, but the delivery system will look different. Instead of a one-day distribution on the Saturday before Turkey Day, our clients will receive these holiday staples during their regular food pantry visit in the four weeks leading up to the big day, along with a small gift card to purchase additional ingredients.

The best way to support the holiday feast this year is a cash contribution to our Thanksgiving Basket program. Thank you for fostering the feast!

What would you most like to read about in this newsletter?
Client stories? Volunteer profiles? Hunger and poverty issues? Opportunities to support Circle? Please let me know at juliet@circleofconcern.org!

Our Mission: Circle of Concern feeds the hungry and provides assistance to low-income families living in west St. Louis County.
Our Vision: Improving every life in our community by reducing hunger and poverty.

3 Things
1. Sugar-free items, like jams, syrups, candies
2. Gluten-free products, like baking mixes, cereals, side dishes
3. Vegetarian / Vegan foods, like seasoning mixes, refried beans, plant-based proteins

The Only Way is Through... cont. from front page
- Limit your news and social media intake – a steady diet of bad news keeps fear and anxiety elevated.
- Laugh at something every day – cartoons, family pictures, pet videos or some classic Stooges decrease stress hormones and trigger endorphins, the body’s natural feel-good chemical.
- Ask for help – if simple coping techniques don’t work, know that you’re not alone and that help is available. Tell someone you trust how you are feeling, call your doctor’s office for a referral, call 1-800-662-HELP (the national Helpline of the government’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) for local resources or dial 911 in you feel you are in crisis.

Niki adds, “The best advice I can give is to treat yourself, and those around you, with the same grace and kindness you would show to a loved one who has fallen on hard times. Try to practice patience, openness, support, and understanding. And practice forgiveness if or when things fall short of expectations. We are all going through that “hard time” collectively and trying to make it to the other side the best as we can. Try to take this day-by-day, or even hour-by-hour, and know that it will not last forever. We are all quite literally in this together.”
We share many donations with our clients:
- Food, Canned and Packaged
- Fresh Garden Produce
- Dry Pet Food, Litter
- New Blankets, Hats, Gloves

Donations are accepted:
Monday............... 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Tuesday............... 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Monetary gifts to Circle, as well as food donations, may qualify you for the Missouri Food Pantry Tax Credit. Contact juliet@circleofconcern.org for more information.

Important Dates:
- September 7 Circle Closed in Observance of Labor Day
- September 21 VIRTUAL Board of Directors Meeting 5:30 p.m.
- November 19 Old Newsboys Day!
- November 25 - November 27 Circle Closed for Thanksgiving
- November 30 VIRTUAL Board of Directors Meeting 5:30 p.m.

“LIKE US” on Facebook and visit us online at www.circleofconcern.org.