



Be Concerned

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2021: adjusting to life with COVID

If 2020 for Be Concerned was an all-out sprint to provide food to thousands of Northern Kentuckians, 2021 was a slog of constant adjustments with the agency trying to steer a safe course for customers, volunteers and staff as the pandemic ground on.

Expect that sorting-out process to continue through this year, said Be Concerned Executive Director Andy Brunzman.

"It's been a challenge to provide services in ways most desirable to our customers," he said.

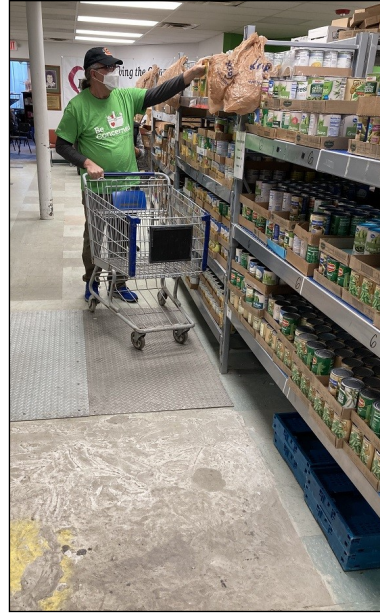
Be Concerned is grappling with the reality that has

emerged in the last few months about the pandemic: Rather than striving for ultimate subjugation of COVID, we must learn how to coexist with it as safely as possible.

At Be Concerned, that means re-evaluating strategies and tactics that date back to the spring of 2020, when COVID exploded locally.

The food distribution model is foremost among them.

Both pantries moved grocery hand-offs to their parking lots in the first week of the pandemic to minimize contact between volunteers/staff and shoppers. The switch was cited



Measures to protect shoppers from COVID persisted in 2021. LEFT, volunteer John Rouser fills a food order in the Covington pantry while his customer waits in the lobby. ABOVE, Site Director Dave Laake loads groceries directly into the car of a shopper in Erlanger, which continues to use a drive-through model.

as the major reason why the organization set all-time service records in 2020 -- 6,746 individuals in 2,809 households.

Covington reopened its building to shoppers in July 2020, but they have been restricted to the lobby while volunteers in the pantry fill their food orders.

Brunzman said he expected to reopen Covington's pantry to shoppers

sometime in 2022, perhaps this summer when COVID cases are expected to decline even more.

But he acknowledged that change might have some exceptions to accommodate shoppers still not comfortable with being indoors in tight quarters with other people.

"Maybe we'd have cer-

tain days with full pantry shopping and other days when we are out of the pantry entirely and back in the parking lot for people who need to be socially distanced," Brunzman said.

The prognosis for Erlanger seems to be more certain, with parking lot appointments continuing for the foreseeable future.

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A volunteer surge, and a new coordinator hired

By using technology to its traditional person-to-person recruiting, Be Concerned attracted a record 550 new volunteers from December 2020 through January 2022.

That influx of new help has been a blessing, of course, but also created a challenge: how to keep that flow going and to make sure all those helpers are trained and utilized

effectively.

So, the agency has created a new position, Volunteer Coordinator, and hired Amanda Coffman, a Mount St. Joseph University intern at Be Concerned the past year, to fill it. She started Jan. 3 and will oversee recruiting, orientation and onboarding of new arrivals.

Through the years, Be Concerned's best volunteer recruiters have been peo-

ple already helping in its programs. But it made sense to augment that approach with technology that had proved effective in other organizations.

Development Director Lynda Crossan chose Sign-UpGenius, a free platform launched in 2008 that enables users to list their volunteer needs by date, time and task.

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Bishop Brossart High students, one of numerous school groups to help at Be Concerned in 2021, listen to instructions from operations manager Dan Clifford before starting a shift in Covington.

Learning to live with COVID likely to continue in 2022

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Most of the volunteers there started after COVID manifested. So, their entire experience with food distribution has involved parking lot handoffs.

“Our Erlanger volunteers have zero COVID concerns,” Brunsman said.

He hopes to survey shoppers in the first quarter of 2022 in both pantries about what model they prefer.

Another major decision related to COVID and appearing in flux this year at Be Concerned is the mask mandate.

Be Concerned has mandated them for everyone in its buildings nearly the entire 2 years since the pandemic started. But if cases and positivity rates continue to decline, that requirement might be discarded in the first half of the year, Brunsman said.

Be Concerned has already learned lessons from COVID, he said.

- Many middle-class families are working paycheck to paycheck, leaving little capacity to weather crises like the pandemic without outside help.

- In crisis situations, people’s fears have to be addressed so they are assured they’re not taking undue risks to access the help offered them.

- Collaborations are key to keeping food flowing, particularly in the midst of broader crises. Be Concerned will continue partnerships with Esperanza Latino Center, the Life Learning Center and Learning Grove forged just before or during the pandemic. All 3 get food through Be Concerned for their constituencies.

Whatever curves COVID throws this year, Be Concerned will remain dedicated to the mantra it has followed the last decade, Brunsman said. “We will do more for more with more.”

Coordinating volunteers her new job

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(Lynda left Be Concerned Feb. 25 to return to the private sector.)

The change made 2021 a year unlike any other for volunteers, attracting school groups, individual students needing service hours, retirees and younger adults. Some came just once, but many have become regulars, joining the 100+ folks who help weekly.

Robin O’Connor of Park Hills registered on Signup Genius in January 2021. She now helps a day or two a week, stocking Lobby Food in Covington. “My goal is to make it look like a grocery store,” she said.

“There’s food here for any-

one who needs it,” she added. “It’s a good feeling to help people.”

The surge in 2021 was more than 4 times a typical a year’s new volunteers. In 2019, for example, there were just 93.

Marketing and social media occupied much of Amanda’s intern time, but she also had lots of volunteer contact.

“We couldn’t function without them,” she said. “Staff run behind-the-scenes things, but the volunteers really put on the show.”

Amanda has a B.A. in communications and new media from Mount St. Joseph and will finish work on an MBA from the Mount in May.

Be Concerned 2021: Numbers that Matter

| | |
|---|--|
| Total Service Counts (Pantries/Deliveries/Emergency Food) X,XXX,XXX | Individuals/Families Helped (Unduplicated) 5,725/2,328 |
| Food Rescued X,XXX,XXX lbs. | Food donated X,XXX,XXX lbs. |
| Total Food Distributed X,XXX,XXX lbs. | Volunteers/Volunteer hours 594/14,390 |
| Emergency Food Orders Filled 1,224 | Food Deliveries 10,200 |
| ESL Night Families/Individuals (Unduplicated) XXX/XXXX | |
| Kids who received Christmas toys 727 | Average Grocery Value per pantry visit \$225-250 |



New Volunteer Coordinator Amanda Coffman already has seen how essential volunteers are to Be Concerned.

To sign up as a volunteer at Be Concerned, go to:
<https://beconcerned.org/donate-time/>

Volunteer Appreciation party set for April 11

Be Concerned volunteers will take day off in April for some special recognition.

The agency’s Volunteer Appreciation Event is set for 4:30 PM Monday, April 11 at The Yard, at 4th and Greenup, Covington, and will featured snacks and a free bar.

“It’s been 2 crazy years with COVID, but we’ve had a great response from our volunteers, so this is a chance to recognize them,” said Andy Brunsman, Be Concerned Executive Director.

The open-air event is open to volunteers past and present.

To make reservations, which are required, respond to info@beconcerned.org.

Versatile Rizzo pair honored with VOTQ award for Q4/'21

When Debbie Rizzo retired in January 2021, it was a given that some of her free time would be spent volunteering at Be Concerned. After all, she had a 20-year history with the organization.

And when Debbie's husband, Pete, stepped down from his family business in 2020, Debbie expected that he would join her at Be Concerned.

As it turned out, she was correct on both counts. She rejoined the volunteer staff at Be Concerned in February 2021, and now works 2 days a week in the Covington thrift store, Betty's Treasures

Pete, who sold his inter-

est in Rizzo Brothers Painting Contractors in 2020, joined Be Concerned last spring. He now drives on Thursdays, picking up pallets of donated goods from Kroger. And he's done 3 carpentry projects for the store.

The Rizzos proved such a dynamic duo that they have been named 2021 Volunteers of the 4th Quarter. The award recognizes those who've gone above and beyond in their service to Be Concerned.

Nancy Hiltibrand, whose family and service ties to Be Concerned go back more than 40+ years, persuaded Debbie to start helping in the Covington pantry in the 1990s. Deb-



Pete & Debbie Rizzo have been named outstanding volunteers for the 4th quarter of 2021. With them, left, is Nancy Hiltibrand, lead volunteer for Betty's Treasures thrift store, for which Debbie volunteers and Pete has done carpentry projects.

bie went on to serve on the Be Concerned board, including a term as president.

Debbie's return to Be Concerned came as Betty's Treasures, the Covington thrift store, is enjoying a renaissance under the direction of Nancy, who retired 5 years ago and now volunteers about 20 hours a week there. The store is named for her mother, Betty Zimmer. It grossed more than \$92,000 in 2021, easily its best year ever.

"The transformation is amazing,"

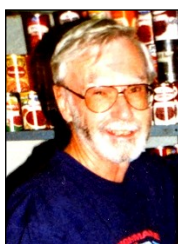
Debbie said. "The quality of things we're getting, the space we have. Nancy is great. She reminds us why we're here and what we're supposed to be doing."

Besides doing Kroger runs, Pete installed a large window in the shoe room at the thrift store. He's been as likewise pleased with his Be Concerned experience as Debbie has.

"I like the people and I like what you guys do," he said. "I've been very fortunate in my life, and it's nice to be able to give back."

Volunteers Remembered FRED BOERGER

Unlike many volunteers, Fred Boerger didn't wait until he retired to start helping at Be Concerned. Starting in the mid-1980s, he utilized vacation days from the accounting department at General Electric to help set up the Christmas Store, said his wife, Mary Jo.



Fred

Fred, who died Jan. 3, went on to serve 30+ years at the agency.

Fred & Mary Jo, who later was co-director of the organization, got involved with Be Concerned through Betty Zimmer, longtime lead volunteer and prime mover in starting the Covington pantry in 1987.

After Fred retired in 1992, he became a weekly volunteer in the food room, helping shoppers make their choices. His service ended only when

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New donor database up and running

Be Concerned had more going on in the last 2 months of 2021 than providing Thanksgiving food and the Christmas Store to more than 1,000 families.

The agency also switched to Bloomerang, a new donor database that will help it better communicate with and serve supporters.

"We went live during the Christmas season, our busiest fundraising time of year," said Lynda Crossan, who oversaw the change. "And with absolutely no problems."

Bloomerang, established in 2012 and headquartered in Indianapolis, boasts multiple advantages over the donor-base systems Be Concerned has used in the past.

Among them, it's:

- User-friendly. "It's logical in how its platform was built," Lynda said. "Bloomerang obviously understood the mindset of nonprofits in designing the program."

- Web-based, so it can be

"Bloomerang obviously understood the mindset of nonprofits in designing the program." — Lynda Crossan

accessed from remote sites outside Be Concerned.

- Customer-service focused, with a chat-based system that provides answers to user questions in just a few minutes.

Lynda consulted philanthropy trade groups, online reviews and other local nonprofits already using Bloomerang before choosing the

program for Be Concerned.

It will help send acknowledgments for most financial donations within a week of receipt. Thanks for in-kind gifts will take a little longer.

Bloomerang should help Be Concerned shift more of its communication with supporters to email.

"There is still a lot of capability in the program that we haven't discovered," Lynda said. "I think there is a lot more we can do with it."

Volunteer Julee Stroup, whom Lynda trained on the the platform, said it makes her task of sending acknowledgments to donors much easier.

"I love Bloomerang," Julee said.



Be Concerned

The People's Pantry

1100 Pike St.
Covington, KY 41011

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Be Concerned

The People's Pantry

Only
3,000
tickets will
be sold!

Spring Bourbon Raffle



Use this QR Code to buy tickets!

All proceeds benefit our monthly pantry programs which provide food, cleaning supplies, and personal hygiene items to 1,000 families.



Matthew Powers, left, and Jacob Westerfeld attended Super Bowl LVI on tickets raffled off by Be Concerned. They are pictured at the game with the Vince Lombardi trophy, which goes to the game winner. Matthew's wife, Alli, bought the winning chance. The game tickets were provided by Be Concerned supporters who asked to remain anonymous.



Purchase your \$10 chance to win a 15 Year bottle of Pappy Van Winkle!

Ticket sales begin 3/15/22 10:00 am EST and end 4/12/22 3:00 pm EST.

Winner to be drawn 4/12/22 at 4:00 pm EST. You do not need to be present to win. Must be 21 years old to buy a ticket.

ORG 000820

fly.causepilot.com/beconcerned/pappyvanwinkle

Volunteers Remembered FRED BOERGER

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health issues sidelined him for good 3 years ago.

Jerry Stegman, Fred's friend since high school, began volunteering at Be Concerned at Fred's invitation in 1994.

"Fred and I always en-

joyed helping people through the food room," Jerry said. "He was funny, good to be around."

Besides Mary Joe, surviving Fred are two daughters and four sons; 12 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren.