A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

When many of us think about helping those in poverty or in difficult circumstances, we often think in terms of material assistance. We think, "We need to give money for rent, food for the hungry, or clothes for those who are struggling." But this is not really what poverty alleviation is all about.

Instead, poverty alleviation is about relationships. The path to greater stability in one's life requires a community around you. Additionally, as a ministry, we cannot effectively address the root causes of poverty if we do not know our neighbors we are serving.

One major way we sought to accomplish that goal this year was by returning our food pantry to in-person shopping. The new pantry design is much more conducive to fostering conversations among shoppers and between staff & volunteers and shoppers. This is leading to a stronger sense of community. But that's just one example.

This annual report offers a glimpse of the amazing work our staff and volunteers have accomplished this year.

There is so much we could share from the past year that can't be packed in a report, but I hope this gives you a taste of what is happening at COM these days!

-Micah Titterington, Executive Director
2022 BY THE NUMBERS

In 2022, COM served 1,143 households (consisting of 2,520 individuals) across all our programs. This represents a 2.4% increase in need over 2021.

A HUGE INFLUENCE

These 2,520 individuals in the households we served represent 7.9% of the entire population of Polk County! That means 1 in 13 people in the county live in households that have been helped by COM.

THE IMPACT OF INFLATION

We saw higher numbers in the food pantry, particularly in the spring and summer compared to previous years, including 2020. This was likely driven by increasing grocery and fuel prices during the same period.
A COMMUNITY EFFORT

It takes a lot to move over 200 tons of food and to get it into people’s hands. The food COM hands out in our pantry comes from local retail pickups (Walmart, ALDI, Woods, Kum & Go, Little Caesars), purchases and free product from Ozarks Food Harvest, and food drives put on by local churches, businesses, and organizations.

GOING DEEPER

One of our pantry goals is to go beyond hand-outs and focus more on developing people’s skills to reduce instability in their lives. In September, we started offering weekly life skills classes and have seen 73 of our neighbors participate and engage in these classes.

14,024 VOLUNTEER HOURS

Our volunteers contributed $381,586 worth in labor to COM’s mission in 2022. These hours were provided by over 466 unique individuals who tackled jobs from helping in the food pantry, cleaning and maintenance, sorting donations, data entry, and more!
New Approach to Benevolence

Since its beginning in the 1990’s as the Bolivar Area Ministerial Alliance, COM has been involved in addressing emergency needs, such as help with rent, utility bills, fuel, and emergency lodging.

However, our years of experience and the experience of other faith-based poverty alleviation groups has taught us that it’s too easy for churches and charities to be quick to offer financial relief without encouraging individual responsibility in the person we’re helping. But, providing relief without also focusing on developing an individual’s stability and resilience only creates unhealthy dependency.

As such, we implemented several changes to our benevolence policy in 2022 to better ensure wise use of our benevolence funds. Above is a summary of the funds we distributed to local households, and on the following page you can see how we worked to encourage stability in people’s lives through these funds.
VIP PROGRAM
A key principle in effective poverty alleviation work is creating systems of “exchange” with those we serve. Instead of a giver-recipient relationship with those in poverty, it is best to partner with those facing material poverty and encourage them to participate in their own solutions. This means creating ways for people to maintain their dignity through earning assistance rather than just passively being a recipient and losing their dignity.

COM’s Voluntarily Invested Partners (VIP) program allows our neighbors to use their gifts to volunteer at COM in exchange for assistance with fuel or small bills. For example, a person needing a $30 gas voucher can choose to work 3 hours volunteering at COM to earn a voucher. Not only does this preserve people’s dignity, but it also gives us more time to spend with our neighbors where we can learn more about their story and challenges they face.

BUDGETING
In the fall of 2022, COM began requiring a budget worksheet and budgeting case management meeting with those who are seeking rent or utility assistance. We began doing this because we realized it does no good to help a person one month if they don’t have a long-term plan to pay their bills the next month or if the root of their funding shortfall (unemployment, payday loans, excessive spending, etc.) is not addressed. This not only deters those who are making their rounds looking for a quick handout but have no intention to change, but also allows for more meaningful conversations with those who legitiately need help.
MOBILIZING THE POLK COUNTY WORKFORCE

The pandemic exposed many systemic problems in our society and aggravated numerous existing challenges in our workforce. One such challenge has been transportation. There are many in our community who are ready and willing to work, but struggle to gain or maintain employment due to lack of reliable transportation. In early 2022, Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO) launched the "Let's Get to Work Fund" to help local nonprofits assist individuals with work-related transportation needs. COM received a $6,000 grant from the Fund to help with vehicle repairs and other employment-related transportation needs in Polk County. This fund has been a game changer for many in our community. We also received an additional $10,000 in the fall which is currently being used to help more families.

One local employer referred an employee to COM for help. The employee was a hard-worker, but had four bald tires which posed a risk to her long-term stability. COM was able to purchase new tires to remove the risk of a blow-out which could have put her job at risk.

Another individual helped by COM was struggling to keep her job because her engine needed repairs and was creating inconsistency in getting to work on time. COM was able to help her with the repair. Several months later, thanks to the repair, this neighbor just passed her 1-year work anniversary!

IMPACT

17 households assisted with vehicle repairs to gain or maintain employment
Early in 2022, COM began studying whether to continue our drive-thru pantry (which began in March 2020 with COVID) or to return to an in-person model. After speaking with other pantries, food co-ops and non-profits, as well as speaking with our pantry beneficiaries, we decided to return inside for the food pantry.

There were numerous reasons for this, but two primary reasons rose to the top. First, bringing the pantry back inside allowed our neighbors to pick out their own food, rather than having everything pre-bagged. This is especially good for those with dietary restrictions and helps everyone reduce their food waste. Second, we made the change to better foster relationships and community within the pantry.

Why we returned to in-person shopping:

1. Allow more choice in food
2. Encourage relationships and community
The fact is that hunger and food insecurity will never be solved by simply giving away food. Giving food can provide temporary relief, but it rarely addresses the underlying causes of food insecurity. Handing out food alone does not increase a person’s income, improve a person’s housing, help a person stay employed, treat addictions, or meet any of the other root causes of hunger and poverty.

At the end of the day, hunger and poverty can only be solved through restored relationships. We all need restored relationships with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with God. This restoration simply cannot be accomplished effectively through a drive-thru model. Hence, we brought our pantry back inside to build a sense of community.

The new pantry is set up like a grocery store. There is no line to follow to get food; instead our neighbors move freely about, pick out food they want, and talk with people they encounter. Additionally, most food is now on a “point system.” Shoppers get a base set of points to use for the month, but can also earn additional shopping points by participating in life skills classes or case management. This is helping incentivize behaviors that will lead to greater stability and less dependency in those we serve.

In just the past four months since we switched in September, we have seen some incredible things happening. Not only have shoppers appreciated the ability to choose their own food, but we’ve observed meaningful interactions happening. In our first month coming back inside, we saw shoppers hugging each other for the first time in two and half years. One volunteer spoke with a couple facing a really hard time and had the opportunity to pray with and encourage them. We’ve seen volunteers and shoppers exchanging recipe ideas in the produce section. If these kinds of connections and relationships can be made in just four short months, we are excited to see what 2023 will bring.
Project Thrive Classes

Coinciding with the pantry change in September 2022, our Project Thrive program began offering weekly life skills classes to promote financial wellbeing and physical & social health among those we serve. Each week a different class is offered. Classes we’ve done have included budgeting, gardening, cooking and nutrition, winterizing your home, basic computer skills, and more.

**Improved Stability**

Students in classes have learned new skills to improve their lives. For example, 21 in 33 students who took budgeting demonstrated greater budgeting knowledge after just one class.

**Community**

73 individuals participated in classes since Sept. Eleven of them attended at least one class every month. Students attended an average of 3.4 classes. We’ve also seen students supporting each other during class sessions.

**Pantry Help**

In addition to learning skills, students earn bonus points for use in the food pantry by attending classes. This helps reward positive behaviors that can lead to positive change.

"The life skills classes are very informative. Also, the other students make the class even better because they add more information and I enjoy getting to meet people and get to know them better."

-Ken R, student
In October 2022, COM hosted its first ever poverty alleviation conference. The goal of this event was to train local church members and leaders on how to effectively work with those experiencing poverty. The first year of "RESTORED" saw about 20 individuals gather to study Scripture and learn from professionals in the field. Bryan Stallings of Elevate Branson and John Boyd of Journey Church joined COM’s Micah Titterington in teaching the group. We had lots of great discussion and attendees gained new insights into this work.

If you missed it, you can watch the recorded sessions online at www.bolivarcom.org/restored

"CHURCH FOR THE POOR: SCRIPTURE’S CALL TO SERVE"
MICAH TITTERINGTON
Community Outreach Ministries

"HELPING WITHOUT HURTING: THE ELEVATE BRANSON STORY"
BRYAN STALLINGS
Elevate Branson

"NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT & CHURCH BENEVOLENCE"
JOHN BOYD
Journey Church
In spring of 2022, COM launched "Compassion Collaborative," our new monthly giving program. Each year, one-third of COM’s annual revenue comes from local donations. Monthly donors are a big piece of this. COM created Compassion Collaborative as a way to both say "thank you" and foster a sense of shared mission. This is because monthly donors are more than just financial support. They truly are partners in our ministry.

"MONTHLY DONORS ARE MORE THAN JUST FINANCIAL SUPPORT. THEY TRULY ARE PARTNERS IN OUR MINISTRY."

As the name suggests, COM seeks to not just benefit from our monthly donors, but to collaborate with them. "Collaborators" get to participate in a bi-annual book club, get discounts to COM trainings and events, get insider updates, and more.

In 2022, COM added 19 new monthly donors, an important step in creating a sustainable mission. Membership in Compassion Collaborative begins at just $20/month.

**BENEFITS**

**FRIEND LEVEL: at least $20/month**
- Regular insider communications and opportunities to provide feedback
- Year-end contribution statement showing your impact
- Invitation to participate in biannual book club study just for Compassion Collaborative members
- Invitation to exclusive Compassion Collaborative Facebook group for discussion and updates of COM’s ministries and initiatives
- First opportunity to register for annual Year-in-Review luncheon
- 50% off admission to COM’s annual conference

**ADVOCATE LEVEL: at least $50/month**
- All Friend Level benefits
- Book included at no cost for biannual book club
- 75% off admission to COM’s annual conference

**PARTNER LEVEL: at least $100/month**
- Friend & Advocate Level benefits
- Free admission to Annual Conference
- 10% discount at Compassion Thrift
- Inclusion as a “Partner Donor” in COM’s Annual Report

Learn more at bolivarcom.org/compassion-collaborative
Staffed by an awesome team of employees and volunteers, Compassion Thrift, COM’s thrift store, saw another year of record sales. Together they set a new, all-time annual record for sales of $179,808. Not only did this help COM fund its other programs, such as the food pantry and Pathways program, but the store itself has been a valuable resource for low-cost clothing and goods at a time when many families have seen their budgets hit hard by inflation.

Record Sales in 2022!

- **All-Time Annual Sales** - $179,808 in annual sales surpassed the previous record set in 2021 by over $23,000.
- **Monthly Sales Record** - June 2022 saw the highest ever monthly sales in the store with $18,201 in revenue
- **Top 3 Highest Months for Sales** - The 3 highest grossing months for sales in the store’s history all came in 2022, each of those months seeing over $17,000 in sales.
- **New Monthly Sales Records Set** in 10 of 12 months in 2022
On Sept. 24, ten contestants took the stage at Bolivar High School to compete in COM's inaugural "Polk County's Got Talent" fundraiser show. The event raised $15,000 in its first year and generated lots of excitement for next year. Robert Clark, a high school comedian, took home the grand prize in year one.

Watch for updates & ticket sales for the 2023 show at bolivarcom.org/gottalent
As COM has grown over the past two years, we have outgrown our current space. The addition of new staff and programs has used up all our usable office space. And, as programs like Project Thrive grow in scope, we also have more need for classrooms and meeting rooms.

COM does have additional space in our upstairs floor, but this has limited usability due to no elevator. This means that many of our neighbors and partners cannot effectively access this space.

In July 2022, COM was awarded $111,002 in Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) tax credits through the state of Missouri’s Dept. of Economic Development for the purpose of renovating our space.

Over the past few months, we have been working with Design Group Architects to design our renovation project. The planned renovation will add 7 new offices, a new meeting room, and an elevator to our building. This project will not only accommodate our current needs, but create room for future growth in the coming years as well.

Keep watch in 2023 for more plans to be revealed!

What are NAP Tax Credits?
Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) tax credits are awarded by the Missouri Dept. of Economic Development and allow Missouri businesses to redirect a portion of their state taxes to qualified local nonprofits, like COM.

When businesses donate $1,000 or more to COM, they can receive a 70% tax credit! But COM only has a limited number of these credits to hand out. Learn more about NAP credits on DED’s website at ded2.mo.gov/nap

Who can receive NAP credits?
Qualifying Missouri businesses or certain individuals with qualifying business income can receive NAP credits.

Interested in Donating for this Project?
VISIT
www.bolivarcom.org/nap
TO GET STARTED
Thank you to our 2022 Compassion Collaborative Partner-Level Members!

Andy Highfill
Carl & Debra Coppage
Chad & Erin Anderson
Courtney Brummel
James & Cheri Jones
Leonard & Linda Zanatta
Mike & Michelle Bates
Neal & Laura DeShazo
Paul Wall
Peter & Mary Roker
Robert Jeffries
Thomas & Sarah Jones

Thank you to our 2022 Monthly Church Partners!

Alliance Christian Fellowship
Bolivar First Christian Church
Mt. Gilead United Methodist
The Heights

Bolivar First Assembly
First Baptist Church of Bolivar
Open Hearts United Methodist
Wellspring Baptist Fellowship
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