

BACN

BENZIE AREA CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORS

A CARING COMMUNITY OF NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS



A SEASON OF FLEXIBILITY SUMMER 2020

FLEXIBILITY | Bending easily without breaking, the willingness to change

DEAR FRIENDS

What a difference a year has made! Last summer found us welcoming the season in anticipation of the bustling days associated with our up north summers. This year finds us still welcoming the season but serving Neighbors in a much different way. Since mid-March the food pantry has become a drive-through model, and financial assistance is being given over the phone. We've been helping people with clothing on an individual and as-needed basis because the building and Clothing Center have been closed. GED continues to run remotely, with students participating in a virtual graduation service. Never have we imagined a time when we would not be able to welcome Neighbors and volunteers into BACN's building. The building is quiet these days. We miss hearing Neighbors visit and laugh together, seeing children play in the clothing center and watching the GED students walking in and out of the classroom. We miss our volunteer family terribly, and are grateful to those who are currently coming in to answer phones and help in the pantry. Flexibility has been key to making

the changes needed to keep going, and we're proud to be part of such a flexible community. From the agencies who so nimbly have continued to serve, to the local presses sharing assistance resources, to the businesses that completely changed service protocols, to the patrons who have stepped up to support them--we've all had a piece in sustaining our community. While we don't know the timeline for reopening, we have confidence in our local health department to guide our steps for safely letting people back into the building. As our economy rebuilds, BACN will see families who have never before needed assistance, and we will be here, eager to welcome them. We are only able to make that commitment with confidence due to our caring community. Ours is truly a neighborhood where people take seriously the honor of being their brother's and sister's keeper. As our community takes its next steps together, we're thankful for all of you, and for the flexibility of your open arms and hearts.

Gratefully,



Gerri VanAntwerp,
Executive Director





FLEXIBILITY IN ACTION

INSPIRED TO HELP



BACN has been the recipient of so many creative community and individual efforts to help during this time! The Roadhouse Mexican Bar and Grill and A&W of Frankfort gave us dozens of gift cards so Neighbors could enjoy an evening meal. The Garden Theater hosted a virtual 5K with proceeds going to BACN. Individuals bought hundreds of restaurant gift cards and coupons to slip into pantry food bags.

The impact of one community member is going an especially long way in helping BACN cover additional costs. Hank Dow saw a 9 & 10 News article detailing funding needs of area food pantries, in tandem with the growing number of people out of work and unable to feed their families. Dow, a long-time supporter of BACN, was inspired to help.

“My initial plan was to donate \$10,000. Upon further consideration I wanted a plan that might inspire and include many others. That led to a donation of \$5,000 and a community challenge to raise another \$5,000, which I would match. If this was accomplished it would raise much more than my initial plan,” said Dow. “I was hoping this challenge would build a sense of community during these troubling times, and would let people participate no matter how large or small the donation.”

As the community raced to meet the challenge, Dow saw his original goal far exceeded. “I’m overwhelmed by the response to this challenge,” he said. “For me, the gift is in the giving. I am touched by the generosity of our community, and my heartfelt thanks goes out to all the donors who responded. My hope is for donors to continue to participate generously throughout the duration of this crisis.”

HIGHLIGHT ON A PARTNER’S FLEXIBILITY

A grateful nod goes to The Benzie Bus, who during this pandemic has changed their service model from in-person rides (still being safely provided at 50% capacity as needed) to being the community’s free delivery system for food, prescriptions and face masks! When BACN first approached Benzie Bus to ask if Neighbors could have their food bags loaded right onto the bus, and not have to disembark, the Bus raised the bar by asking, “What if we just pick up the food and deliver it right to their door? Then they don’t even have to ride.”

As of this press date, the Benzie Bus has delivered food for BACN and other local pantries nearly 200 times during the COVID-19 crisis. They’ve also delivered prescriptions over 100 times, shopped for and delivered groceries nearly 500 times, and have delivered needed hand-made face masks to well over 1,000 individuals and business.

Benzie Bus Mobility Manager Jessica Carland says, “It is an honor to serve our community, and we will continue to adjust our service model to meet the changing needs of our residents. We applaud BACN for its exceptional services, and are thrilled to be their partner.”



KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH VOLUNTEERS

Over the past few months, Volunteer Coordinator Sally Bobek has been keeping in touch with the volunteers, making about 15 calls per week along with some emails and texts. “The thing I hear right away, and in almost every call is, “When can we come back?””, says Bobek. “People miss visiting. These phone calls are lasting between 15 minutes and an hour. They share the activities they are doing—lots of crafts being made, and we joke that when this is all done we’ll have a nice craft fair.”

In order to have a sense of normalcy, Zoom meetings were scheduled one week for each day’s volunteers to gather, and experience a time of sharing. It wasn’t quite the same as our cherished morning meetings, but people were very happy to see each other again.

The most frustrating thing? Bobek says, “I’d love to tell them with certainty when we can all come back, but the truth is we just don’t know. We’re listening to all the guidelines from the Health Department and are going to do whatever we need to do to keep serving people, but also to keep people safe.”



“
**FLEXIBILITY MAKES BUILDINGS TO BE STRONGER,
IMAGINE WHAT IT CAN DO TO YOUR SOUL.**

— CARLOS BARRIOS, RENOWNED MAYAN PRIEST

”



“FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY TO STABILITY.”

– COACH JOHN WOODEN

GED CONTINUES

Each year an average of 6 students have obtained their high school diplomas or GEDs through BACN's partnership with the Michigan Works!/Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District. BACN pays for the certified instructor, and students have the convenience of working on their educational goals at BACN, rather than traveling to Traverse City or Manistee.

While the pandemic has created challenges, certified instructor Sue Oseland says her students have been up to the task. “My ideal for the students has been a one-on-one study model. Now we've moved to a different model of utilizing the online system and texting as the primary communication mode,” she said.

Even though she had to flip her study model mid-year, Oseland says five of her students are pressing ahead for their GED this year. She went on to explain some of the challenges being faced by her students. “Some have been dealing with the multiple stresses of job lay-offs plus having children who are now home from school. Adding to the struggle is the fact that GED testing sites across Michigan have been closed. We do anticipate being able to access the sites soon, but like everyone we're dealing with unknowns. We're going week by week.”

Despite the obstacles, the graduates are set to be celebrated for their accomplishments. The Michigan Works Adult Education Director, teachers and aides have planned a virtual graduation on June 11, featuring photos of the students in caps and tassels. We applaud these students for their tenacity in reaching goals during a difficult time!



“I’VE NEVER ASKED FOR HELP...”

Many in our area are feeling the frustration of needing to ask for help due to recent layoffs. The problem is when they apply for government assistance, their income history (when they were employed full time) is considered and they are often turned away.

One new Neighbor shared her experience with BACN:

“I have never asked for help and was very embarrassed to do so, all the more so when the Department of Health and Human Services refused to help me. I thought twice before calling you, but the person who answered said right away, “We are here to help you!” This gave me confidence and faith that perhaps you could save me. Thank you.”

NOTE FROM A GRATEFUL NEIGHBOR

“Hi! I just wanted to send a little note as a thank-you to BACN. Every time I have picked up food there I feel spoiled. Fresh foods, fruits and veggies. Kind people and generous. I don't know if the volunteers ever get thanked but would you please pass on a thank you? I seriously feel spoiled with a car full of good food for my kids today!”

SUMMER MATCH

We are grateful to the John L. Mulvaney Foundation for providing this annual summer challenge to our community. Our Neighbors—those that were already using BACN and those who are new to us—depend on BACN to be there when life hands them seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The funds raised through this match—dollar for dollar up to \$100,000, will ensure BACN can remain the place that says, “Yes, we can help!” The match period runs through August 31. Donations can be made online or mailed to BACN at PO Box 93, Benzonia MI, 49616.

LOOKING AHEAD

What can we expect in the months ahead? While everyone wishes for the proverbial crystal ball, BACN is busy working to build the food and funding reserves to address issues that may arise later this year.



Program Services Coordinator Liz Ham says, “People have been expressing their thanks to us for our help, but I'm not seeing a lot of fear just yet. I think that will change toward the end of summer or early fall. Extra unemployment benefits will eventually end. Landlords will again be able to evict, and just as winter weather begins to loom, utility companies will begin shutoffs for delinquent bills. Schools will stop providing the extra food. What happens if school does not start up as planned in the fall? Then there will be daycare issues on top of the lack of food. And many people are not going to get their jobs back.”

BACN Operations Director Michelle Northrup says, “We've definitely seen an increase in food prices. And for us, the difference is currently coming in the form of shipping expenses. We've not been able to take advantage of everyone's willingness to help with going out and buying food for us, due to reasons surrounding the pandemic.” So far food shipments have been coming through, and in our region we have not seen the shortages of meat and other items others have experienced. “The grocery stores themselves are struggling with their own level of demand,” says Northrup. “All at once people who eat out all the time are needing to buy enough to cook their own food.”

Whatever lies ahead, we are grateful to our giving community—their generous donations are helping us plan to sustain services as needed in the months ahead.

SUMMER MATCH





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- Mac Whisner

OUR TWO MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ARE YOU STILL GOING AHEAD WITH THE BUILDING PROJECT?

A resounding YES! The pandemic has done much to confirm what we've known for so long--that the current building limits our capacity to help Neighbors. While we've been able to adapt, we know we could be doing more. If the new building were already in place the improved number of exits, interior traffic flow and outside lighting would allow us to accommodate social distancing mandates while still allowing Neighbors into the building. The separation of clothing and food areas would allow us to keep the clothing area open. BACN is and always will be more than a building. But that new building will be the tool to allow increased outreach, flexibility and sustainability. The pandemic has only increased our sense of urgency for this project, and we are eager to press forward!

HOW CAN I HELP? WHAT DO YOU NEED?

We are now beginning to take food donations again, and especially welcome donations of staples. We are in need of canned green beans, corn, fruit, tuna and chicken, jars of peanut butter and pasta sauce, packages of brown rice and boxes of cereal.

"Mix" packages can help families celebrate special times. The items can be put together in large lunch or freezer bags. Some examples would be pizza packages (Boboli or other crust, bag of pepperoni, can of sauce and bag of mozzarella cheese) or birthday packages (cake mix, icing tub, cupcake papers, paper plates, candles and noisemakers). We've had groups do these packages in the past and they are always so appreciated!



231.882.9544

2804 Benzie Highway • P.O. Box 93

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