



QUEER MUTUAL AID ZINE

"We didn't ask. We just did it."

compiled by queer kentucky
illustrated by amanda wood



QUEER KY

This project is brought to you by Queer Kentucky, a queer-led nonprofit newsroom documenting LGBTQ+ life across the Commonwealth. Our reporting focuses on the gaps - in care, access, and representation - that shape the lived experiences of queer Kentuckians.

As a journalism organization, we believe our responsibility does not end with coverage. When our work identified a need for safer access to harm reduction resources, we acted by launching harm reduction lockers in local communities.

To stay connected to our reporting and community projects, follow Queer Kentucky on social media or subscribe to our mailing list for updates, new work, and opportunities to engage.

Follow us: @queerkentucky or queerkentucky.com.



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Mutual aid is what happens when a community stops waiting and shows up for itself.

It's messy, practical, and built in real time by people who know care doesn't always come through the right channels - so they build it themselves.



- ↖ I've seen this firsthand. Outside of this role, I am a co-founder of the Covington Community Fridge,
- ↖ a renegade public fridge launched
- ↖ by two queers during the pandemic who saw a gap and filled it.

That impulse - creative people turning imagination into infrastructure - runs through these pages.

This zine documents what happens when art binds people together, and when care becomes collective.

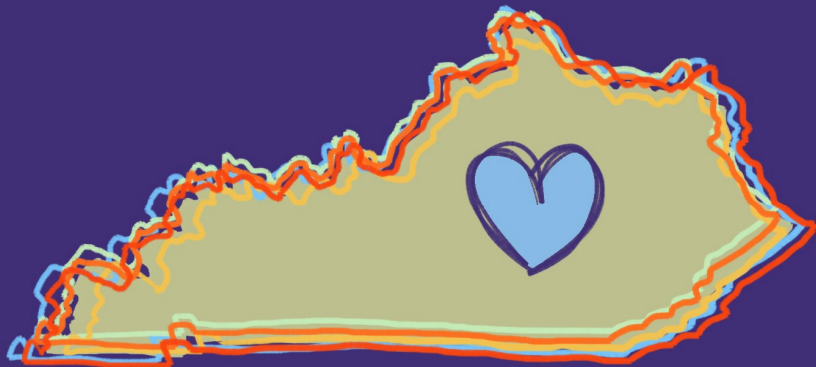
Just do the shit.

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Missy Spears,
Executive Director
of Queer Kentucky



Here are eight people and six organizations
who saw the gap and filled it.



Backwoods Literary Press

Backwoods Literary Press is a scrappy, bold indie press and publisher centering Southern and Appalachian voices from marginalized and censored communities. In an era of book bans and algorithms filtering out content, Townsend recognized the need for a "by us, for us" press house, and impresses that all they started with was a kitchen table, a Google form, and a dream for the world we deserve. By leaning on the community around this prescient issue, existing fundraising models, and folks ready to share their skills, powerful working-class, indigenous, BIPOC, and rural stories are platformed through Backwoods. Townsend says "Fuck the polish... start small, start messy. You don't need permission or perfection."

Belle Townsend
she/they

backwoodsliterarypress.com

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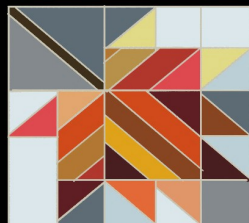
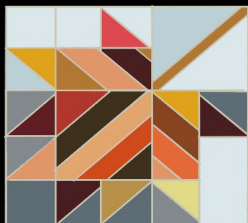


"Backwoods Literary Press is a grassroots project platforming diverse rural artists - especially in the South and Appalachia - through publishing and community events. Our work highlights LGBTQ+ voices and builds creative spaces across rural communities."



WHY did you do it?

"I grew up seeing how isolation and misinformation shape rural life, including how LGBTQ+ people are erased. I didn't think I was the 'best' person for it, but I was at the center of it and I had a force inside me I couldn't ignore, so I just did it."





WHAT WAS THE FIRST STEP?

"It started with me reading poems on TikTok and connecting with rural folks across the U.S., many of whom resonated deeply with the political commentary I was making about how these areas are misunderstood and scapegoated. That connection sparked my first call for submissions, and over 100 writers responded."



WHO SHOWED up?

"Writers and artists from all walks of life - queer, BIPOC, immigrant, rural, and otherwise - came together simply to create a space that felt like home. With the Appalachian Community Fund as our fiscal sponsor, community members generously shared their time, skills, and resources to make it real."

What was harder than you expected?

"The hardest part was moving forward before anyone knew how it would turn out; we're an indie press publishing working-class and censored voices, and it didn't look 'polished.' But we kept at it, and our community showed up anyway."



How can others do what you did?

"Start small, start messy, and start with what you and your community already have. You don't need permission or perfection; you just need a kitchen table, a Google Form, and a few people who believe in the same future you do."

POTLUCK FOR THE PEOPLE

Siri Imani
she/her



Siri Imani sits at the helm of the Triiibe Foundation, Imani Productions, and Triiibe artists collective. Potluck for the People, held the final Sunday of each month, has fed thousands of people experiencing poverty in the Cincinnati/NKY area, and provides hygiene items, seasonally appropriate clothing, haircuts, and resources for the community. For nearly 10 years, they've never missed a month (even through COVID). Imani and Triiibe are representative of how culture, creation, and activism are the backbones of a healthy society; a couple folks with a pot of soup and a determined spirit can create waves of care by committing to showing up, and by listening when the community calls.



www.triibefoundation.com

GROWTH Community Creativity



"Every final Sunday we provide food, clothing, hygiene products, haircuts, & various items to people experiencing homelessness."

Why did you do it?

"I saw people starving, cold, and desperate for basic necessities."

What was the first step?

"A pot and one pot of soup. From there, every month we added something new."

Who showed up?

"So many people. Community leaders, other organizations, restaurants, churches, and mostly regular people."



WHAT WAS HARDER than you expected?



**"Obtaining a permit from the city
& not being kicked out of the space!"**

How Can others do what you did?



"It starts with coordinating 3-10 people. Everyone bring a dish and as many clothes as they can spare to donate. From there, the community will tell you what they need."



Moveable Feast Lexington

Moveable Feast Lexington provides meals to low-income people with HIV/AIDS, folks in hospice care, and their families for free. They deliver freshly prepared meals and meal prep kits in Lexington every weekday.

Aiming to not only destigmatize conversations about health, but serve as members of the community who check on our neighbors daily. MFL nourishes, supports, empathizes, and protects those who rely on their services. By working with partner organizations like AVOL and Bluegrass Care Navigators, Moveable Feast Lexington is changing the conversation around long-term care.

Ned Butler Royce
they/them



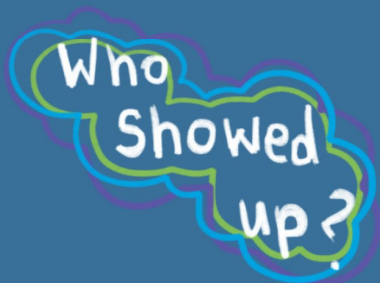
feastlex.org



The Reason why:

"AIDS Activist Michael Thompson started MFL after African American artist, Charles Williams, died in 1998. It was not the disease that killed Williams, but starvation. Michael and his fellow activist Carol Farmer began by redistributing restaurant leftovers and collecting donated food to make sure their community did not go hungry."

"The first step was establishing who was in need and what the most effective way to help was. For people who are homebound with limited energy and mobility, delivering meals was the most helpful way to keep them nourished."



"Michael and Carol were joined by friends and other AIDS Activists. Over the last 30 years, MFL has had over 350 volunteers help the small staff deliver over 800,000 meals."



What was harder than
you expected?

"The stigma surrounding LGBTQ culture and AIDS positive individuals. With community support, Lexingtonians were able to take care of Lexington despite the federal lack of support."

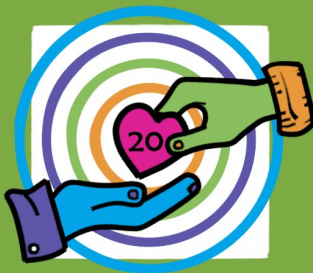




How can others do what you did?

"The most important aspects are hearing what is actually needed, a willingness to receive feedback and change accordingly, and investing in your teammates.

Care and compassion and empathy are all essential to creating sustainable community aid programs."



Redden Gardens

Redden Gardens is a community gardening space that synthesizes the magic of nature with the magic of community. Both food and beauty share space here. Inspired by his family's legacy of civic engagement, and working within existing initiatives for urban agriculture, Goessling was able to navigate the hurdles of ownership changes to establish the garden as a place folks could grow their dinner as well as the micro-social safety net so desperately needed in the urban basin. This project, built over years, required soil cultivation, multiple growing seasons, and dozens of volunteers and has flourished into an integral part of the long, beautiful history of Covington, Kentucky.



WHY
DID
YOU
DO IT?

"People would walk by when I was first constructing the garden and would say, 'I wish they would do more things like this' - as if there is this invisible 'they' who make things happen. But ultimately every action is a decision by an individual. Repeated actions create movement. I was inspired by my grandfather's service to the community and wanted to continue that service in a way that honored him and helped the community."



What was the first step?

"There was at the time an initiative that was forming to promote urban agricultural projects in the city, and through that, I found out about an existing garden that needed energy. After devoting time a few seasons to building that space and community, the owner unexpectedly sold the property and the new owner was inhospitable to us to even finishing our season, so I had to find out how to continue growing."

Who showed up?

"Covington is a very welcoming community with a long history. The Center for Great Neighborhoods was a wonderful asset to help me navigate and decode the alphabet soup of the various acronyms of the numerous community groups. By speaking to many people, and learning about past and current projects, I was able to find community support."

Redden Garden's vision is to grow beauty alongside vegetables,
people alongside community, and stories alongside knowledge.



What was harder than you expected?

"Just because something is a great idea doesn't mean it has staying power. Just because people support your project doesn't mean they see the same value in it that you do."

You have to set boundaries and step back every once in a while."



"Plant many seeds. You can't harvest what you forgot or were reluctant to sow."

Eastern Kentucky Mutual Aid

e.k.y
m.a



Cara Ellis
she/her

Search EKY Mutual Aid on Facebook
or @hillbillieshelpinghillbillies
on instagram

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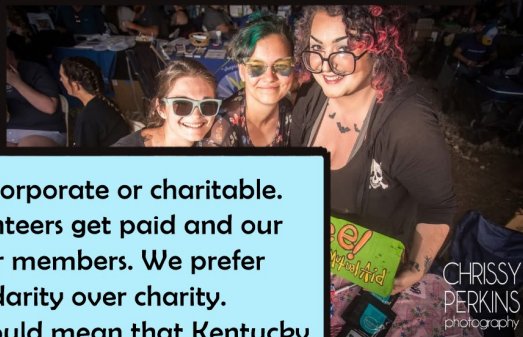
Misty Skaggs
she/her



EKYMA utilizes the existing infrastructure of social media to connect rural people to the resources they need. With over 10,000 participants, people across the region can find support and be supportive in a format that's accessible, mobile, and instant. Creating, building, and maintaining trust is at the forefront of using a platform like Facebook, known for misinformation, to build the networks and relationships necessary to ensure everyone is able to give and receive according to their needs and ability. Ellis stresses that people know when they are in need, and that it's important that they simply show up. Mutual aid and community are reciprocal, and there will always be a time when we can show up for another in need.



"EKY Mutual Aid is a grassroots network of over 10,000 people across Eastern Kentucky who use a shared Facebook group to directly request and offer support. When someone posts a need - whether food, transportation, household items, or emergency help - the community crowdsources resources to meet it quickly, ensuring neighbors take care of one another in real time." - Ellis



"Our work is not corporate or charitable. None of our volunteers get paid and our organizers are our members. We prefer and promote solidarity over charity. Your donations could mean that Kentucky kids ain't going hungry tonight or that somebody's Granny can afford to get her oxygen tank replaced." - Skaggs

What was the first step?

"A group of creatives across Eastern Kentucky came up with an idea for a fund and things exploded from there. Our FB group has become a community hub of 10K people from across Kentucky and the globe."

- Skaggs

Who showed up?

"Eastern Kentucky showed up! We have had constant support from the arts and literature community and from local musicians. We've worked with Baptist churches and The Church of Satan. Our people were eager to come together and make a difference they could see by helping locally and directly."

- Skaggs



"I first experienced the power of mutual aid in 2019 when, after a cancer diagnosis, I relied on community networks, including support from my friend and EKY Mutual Aid founder, Misty Skaggs, to help meet my own needs. That experience led me to stay involved during the pandemic and eventually step into an organizer and moderator role so I could help care for others the way the community once cared for me."

- Ellis

why?
It's personal.



"The queer community showed up for me [then], offering support that carried me through one of the hardest moments of my life. Friends and mutual aid networks stepped in alongside them. It is those same people that continue to show up today, sustaining the work and each other."

- Ellis

What is harder than expected?

"The work is always harder than expected because it takes a lot of trust to work within the realm of mutual aid. You have to trust one another and gain other's trust to make it work effectively." - Ellis

"We're exhausted. Mutual aid is emotionally taxing work. There's no grants pouring in. What gets done gets done because a group of mostly femmes and them are working their collective asses off." - Skaggs

How can others do what you did?

"Don't overthink.
Identify a need
and move to
meet it." - Skaggs



"Honestly, it's best to find like-minded people that you have a good relationship with and just step in and see how you can best help others, whether it's a food drive or networking to find resources. There is no right or wrong way to it."

the Covington Cryptid Block Party

Melissa Silberstang and Amanda Wood are Covingtonian creatives and best friends who believe public celebrations are worth making on purpose and sharing freely with others. Each year, they create a public space where a general sense of delight can exist without stipulations or preconceived notions. Their work is rooted in authenticity, friendship-building, and a conviction that gathering just for the fun of it is not frivolous, but necessary for a healthy community.

Amanda Wood
she/her

Melissa Silberstang
she/her

← did the art
for this zine,
too.

Hi.

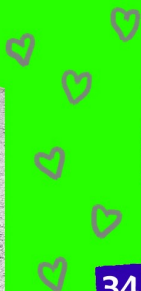
cryptidcov.blog

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WHAT DID YOU MAKE HAPPEN?

"This is a free public street festival created to bring people together without the pressure to spend money or fit into a scene. Built through volunteer labor and personal contribution, it prioritizes accessibility, supports artists at all stages, and gives space to cherished community organizations. By bringing levity, festivity, and an assortment of hijinks in celebration of cryptids, creepids, and weirdos, the Covington Cryptid Block Party creates a third space rooted in connection and shared delight.

In a modern world where public events can often seem to be homogenized and very serious, it offers something many people are missing: a place to gather, be seen, and be glad to be there."



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WHY did you do it?

"We wanted another way to come together in Covington; one that could hold residents, artists, and small businesses all in the same place." - Silberstang

"We wanted a reason to gather that didn't require anything other than wanting to have fun. And we figured we might as well be the ones to make it." - Wood



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↑ ↑
The Muties
at the 2025 CCBP



What was the first step?



"The very first thing we did was just decide to do it. Abruptly. We gave ourselves a very short deadline and threw ourselves into planning, making decor, and inviting everyone we knew." - Wood

Who Showed up?

"We thought people would like our little festival and a few folks would stop by, but we were happily surprised with how many people jumped right in with their cryptid works and their full hearts. With the amount of people who came out to share their enthusiasm, set up booths, contribute art, and tell their friends, we had no shortage of amazing support from Covington, NKY, and beyond.

We still find more of our people every day, and invite virtually anyone to join in the fun with us." - Silberstang



What was harder than you expected?

"For me, time management is hard! And burning out before, during, and afterward. These are real obstacles that do seem to get easier each year, at least." - Wood



How can others do what you did?

"Start small. Our power is with our communities. Connect with the people who believe in your idea and grow from there." - Silberstang

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Mutual aid isn't a brand or a nonprofit structure. It's a behavior that starts when someone notices a gap and doesn't look away.

Start Where You Are

- Share food.
- Share information.
- Share presence.

Care is culture. Organization is authorship.
These are acts of collective imagination.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS UP TO US

Starting a mutual aid project big or small?
Tell us about it at contact@queerkentucky.com

 BIG Thanks to: 

arts
wave

Funding Arts. Fueling Community.

Do you ever look around and think:
"our neighborhood
could really use ____"?

Meet LGBTQ artists & Creatives
who made shit happen.

made possible by:



Funding Arts. Fueling Community.

&

