

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Engage | Empower

Newsletter of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio – an Agency of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Sold-Out “Shine the Light, Be the Light” Gala Raises Over \$100,000 for Su Casa

Su Casa Hispanic Center celebrated its 27th anniversary with a sold-out “Shine the Light, Be the Light” gala, on Sept. 27 at the Bell Event Centre.

The event highlighted Su Casa’s impact as the primary social services provider to Greater Cincinnati’s Hispanic/Latino community, as well as other vulnerable immigrant communities. The gala raised over \$100,000 for Su Casa’s client services and highlighted success stories of empowerment.

With the help of Catholic Charities supporters, Su Casa impacts about 5,000 people each year through emergency assistance, case management, family reunification, health promotion, education services, the Adopt-A-Family Christmas program and more. Additionally, Su Casa’s Home Study/Post-Release Services (HSPRS) program serves unaccompanied children within 200 miles of Cincinnati to keep them safe from human trafficking and exploitation.

The Hispanic/Latino population has blessed the region with positive growth. Traditionally, immigrants have come primarily from Mexico and Guatemala. Now, Cincinnati is also welcoming more newcomers from Colombia, Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela.

“After 27 years of services,” notes Catholic Charities CEO Tony Stieritz, “we celebrate that Su Casa has spanned a generation, and thanks be to God, we’re seeing those once helped by Su Casa give back as staff, volunteers and supporters. With their help as well as ongoing support from our donors and our community partners, Su Casa will keep evolving to serve our neighbors even better and rise to meet new needs and challenges.”

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our sponsors, particularly our Diamond Sponsors, Fifth Third Bank and the Sisters of the Precious Blood. We also thank our Gold Sponsors: Akers Packaging Service Group, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Dismore & Shohl LLP, the Gorilla Glue Company, P&G, U.S. Bank, and Western & Southern Financial Group.



Geraldina, Senior at St. Ursula Academy, presents gift to Su Casa with Laurel Fiorelli, Su Casa Advisory Council Member



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A Message from the CEO



As an agency committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we serve and empower thousands of vulnerable people every year of all ages and backgrounds. Through family development services, senior and caregiver support, food pantries, mental health counseling and immigration programs, Catholic Charities' services advance the wellbeing of the families we serve as well as the vitality of Southwestern Ohio for everyone who lives here.

Among the populations whom we help are migrants and refugees. Since the founding of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio in 1916, our work has involved helping these newcomers achieve the American Dream and join us in building a stronger region for all. Without a doubt, there are serious issues to be addressed

through federal immigration policies. Through it all, however, we continue to provide humanitarian assistance to immigrants who come to us — as the agency has done for over 100 years. I want to recognize two fundamental principles, well defined in the Catholic tradition, which guide our work: **solidarity** and the **common good**.

Solidarity directs us to see all people as fellow humans equal in respect and dignity, as children of God. In a recent public letter concerning the treatment of local migrants, the Catholic bishops of Ohio firmly stated, "The arrival of Jesus Christ in human history confirms the dignity God has given to each of us, without exception... Each of us, therefore, must turn to God and ask for eyes to see the infinite dignity of every person." I encourage you to read the Ohio bishops' letter at www.ohiocathconf.org. For Catholic Charities' work, this means that, however a migrant family arrives to us, we will serve them like any other vulnerable person in need. We will accompany them on their journey to safety and a brighter future.

"The arrival of Jesus Christ in human history confirms the dignity God has given to each of us, without exception... Each of us, therefore, must turn to God and ask for eyes to see the infinite dignity of every person."

Pursuing the **common good** means that our work with all our clients, including migrant families, is always focused on increasing their capacity to contribute to the wellbeing of the society of which they are a part. In Springfield, Ohio, for example, we recently introduced migration-related services, as job development, case management and interpretation, upon request of the community at large. Upon hearing repeatedly from local stakeholders that our services could assist their ongoing work with the local Haitian population and to build a stronger Springfield, we recognized a calling. While we had no role in the arrival of any migrants there, we are blessed to stand in solidarity with this new clientele and advance the long-term common good of the community. To learn more, please visit our website at www.ccswoh.org.

At Catholic Charities, we aim to help our communities thrive by standing in solidarity with all our neighbors in need and empowering their contributions to the common good of all. This is only possible thanks to the prayers, volunteerism and donations of thousands of supporters. Thank you for being a part of this faith-filled work!

In gratitude,

Tony Stieritz
CEO

Service Day Introduces St. Ursula Students to Another Side of Life

St. Ursula Academy students recently had the chance to put their blossoming Spanish-speaking skills to use while giving back to Cincinnati's Hispanic and Latino community.

The students volunteered at Su Casa Hispanic Center on Aug. 28, assembling 220 kits filled with hygiene items and cleaning products for the Fall Health Fair. Sara Obando, Health Promotion Supervisor, welcomed the students and gave them an overview of Su Casa's services — all in Spanish.

"They did great in their Spanish. They are very smart!" says Sara, who is originally from Peru. "It was wonderful talking to these young ladies. I saw on their faces that they felt very happy practicing the language they are learning."

Their time at Catholic Charities also helped the students learn more about parts of the community they might not normally see. Sara hopes experiences that expose young

people to this larger reality will empower them to develop empathy and understanding for people whose daily lives look very different from their own.

"For me, it's very important that they learn about immigration and people in need coming to Cincinnati and all the services Su Casa offers to support this community," Sara says.

The St. Ursula students expressed a desire to continue helping however they can. Mary Anne Bressler, Parish & Community Engagement Coordinator, is always looking to create more ways to engage young people, whether on-site at Catholic Charities or through activities students can organize and participate in independently, like clothing or school supply drives.



Want to Get Involved?

Catholic Charities would love to connect with your school or parish group to explore volunteer and learning opportunities. Please contact Mary Anne Bressler at mbressler@ccswoh.org or 513-672-3714.

"I'm always excited when schools reach out," Mary Anne says. "We want to make it as easy as possible for younger people to support our mission. The more we see them, the more of an imprint we make on the students."

Mental Health Services Makes a Special Connection

Deliana Peralta Fuentes knows what it's like to have one identity at home and one at school. As the daughter of immigrants, she grew up in a Spanish-speaking household but lived in a community and attended schools that shared few, if any, traces of her family's culture.

Today, as a bilingual therapist for Catholic Charities, Deliana provides school-based mental health services for English language learners at Princeton High School, Princeton Community Middle School and the Princeton Innovation Center. She feels a special kinship with the students she serves.

"I'm serving kids I see some of myself in," Deliana says. "I honestly think it's my calling to help these youth."

From offering individual and group therapy to providing consultation to support school staff, Deliana focuses

on being present in whatever ways the community needs her to be.

"Presence is important for the Spanish-speaking community," she says. "Mental health is still pretty new and taboo in that culture. When I meet with parents, I try to normalize that it's OK to see a mental health provider. I want to start that conversation."

The students Deliana works with face unique challenges as immigrants or children of immigrants. Without this program, they would be unable to access mental healthcare to help them process and cope with their experiences.

Many of the students have complex situations at home. In some cases, they were born in the United States but were sent back to Latin America to be raised by extended family. When they return to the U.S., they're often meeting younger siblings for the first time and getting to know parents they haven't seen in years.

They don't speak English and have no familiarity with the American culture.

It's a lot for a young person to handle, especially at a time in life when they're trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. Speaking with them in their native language helps create a comfort zone in which they can open up to Deliana about difficult topics and work on communication, emotional regulation and more.

"It's impactful for the kids to have a provider who understands their culture and what it's like at home and the social norms that come with that," Deliana says. "I can help young people navigate the changes. I know that being an immigrant is much more than just status."



This 'Fish' Story Is All True — and It's Making a Big Splash at Catholic Charities



Catholic Charities Sothwestern Ohio offers two senior volunteer programs - AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparents and AmeriCorps Seniors Senior Companions. Both programs have been a part of Catholic Charities for over 50 years and each program currently has over 100 volunteer enrolled.

The Foster Grandparent Program places older adult volunteers in schools and early childhood centers to serve children needing extra help. Senior Companion volunteers serve older adults in the community with hopes of the client remaining independent in their homes.

Members of the Catholic Charities team have bought into the "FISH! Philosophy" hook, line and sinker in their constant efforts to better serve their clients.

Originated at the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, FISH! is a training program designed to create a positive culture of joy and service.

Aaron Glauberman, Senior & Caregiver Support Services Director, has used the program with his team, as well as with Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion volunteers. FISH!

focuses on four core principles: being emotionally present for people; playing, with consent and when appropriate; finding simple ways to make someone's day; and choosing your attitude.

The result has been greater engagement, stronger teamwork and clients who feel more cared for.

"FISH! helps build trust," Aaron says. "That's what enables our volunteers to serve their clients better. At the end of the day for us, it's about the connections and impact the volunteers make, whether with a kindergartener or an 85-year-old."

FISH! has made a major impact internally, as well. Foster Grandparent Coordinator Contina Lee wears a purple bracelet that says, "Who are you being?" It reminds her every day, in every interaction, to be the best version of herself not just with volunteers and co-workers, but with her friends and family, too.

"It has become a lifestyle, not a training," Contina says. "And it hasn't just impacted the volunteers here, inside the program. We have volunteers who have told us in trainings that they would now use it with their families and their

GONE FISHIN' These are the four core tenets of the FISH! Philosophy:

- 1** Choose Your Attitude
- 2** Be There
- 3** Make Their Day
- 4** Play (with permission and when appropriate)

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FISH!?

Visit the FISH! Philosophy website at www.fishphilosophy.com.

churches. They've taken it out of the training and into their communities."

As with anything new, FISH! can take some time to get used to and implement, but Aaron and Contina agree that the extra work has been well worth it. Thanks to the FISH! Philosophy, everything with the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion programs is going swimmingly!

A Record Summer of Service for Food for All



Biting into a piece of sweet, juicy watermelon or savoring a crisp ear of corn are annual rites of summer. Thanks to Catholic Charities’ Food for All food pantry, more of our neighbors got to enjoy these nutritious treats despite experiencing food insecurity.

In fact, from June 1-August 31, Food for All served its highest number of people ever during that timeframe, including over 250 children more than last summer.

Seasonal produce — including collard greens, kale, cabbage, plantains and

more — was a big draw for a lot of neighbors, says April Hoak, Food for All Coordinator. The Freestore Foodbank sources the produce from farms throughout Ohio. Catholic Charities directs food to some inner city schools and pantries, and it targets its pantries in Adams, Brown, Clermont, Clinton and Highland Counties – under served, rural communities that have limited, healthy food options.

“Many neighbors don’t have that kind of variety and quality in their local grocery stores,” April says. “We’re

happy to be able to share that type of nutritional impact in the community.”

As the costs of housing, groceries and medication remain high, April expects to see growing demand at each pantry distribution. Adults over 60, many of whom live on fixed incomes, make up the largest single group of neighbors who attend, but people come from all backgrounds and circumstances.

Sometimes, families who now share a home to save on rent arrive in carpools together. Some neighbors ride a bike or even walk to pick up groceries. Food for All volunteers go out of their way to make sure everyone who comes for food has a way to get that food home safely.

Letting neighbors know they’re respected and cared for is as vital a part of Food for All’s mission as distributing wholesome, nourishing food.

“People feel seen and treated with dignity by the service we offer and the volunteers who help us provide that service,” April says.

More volunteers are urgently needed. If you’d like to help, please contact April Hoak at 513-672-3720 or ahoak@ccswoh.org.

Summer 2024: By the Numbers

JUNE	
Families 912	Children 473
Individuals 2,267	New families 119
Seniors 824	Weight of food distributed 34,623 pounds

JULY	
Families 909	Children 569
Individuals 2,358	New families 119
Seniors 836	Weight of food distributed 36,275 pounds

AUGUST	
Families 921	Children 546
Individuals 2,300	New families 132
Seniors 856	Weight of food distributed 46,353 pounds

Local Teens Ensure a Warm Welcome for Refugees

"Your faith will be like gold that has been tested in a fire. And these trials will prove that your faith is worth much more than gold that can be destroyed." — 1 Peter 1:7



Dan Sarell, Mission Advancement Director and Jackson Hamon, Seven Hills High School student

Tonight, a newly arrived refugee family will sit down to dinner at a beautiful table with matching benches, all handcrafted just for them. They might not know that, like the family themselves, the woodwork is a symbol of resilience. But what they will know is that **Cincinnati is a welcoming community — right down to some of its youngest members.**

Jackson Hamon, a student at Seven Hills High School, made the table and benches in his grandfather's workshop as part of his Personal Challenge Project for school and decided to donate them to Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Services (RRS).

Before he could do that, a fire tore through the workshop yet left the table and benches virtually unscathed. In fact, Jackson says, the heat of the fire caused the wood to expand, which

actually made the pieces stronger — a fitting metaphor for the determined newcomers who will use the furniture.

"I hope they can see it is made with care and that they can feel cared for with this table," Jackson says.

Jackson was inspired to donate to RRS through his participation in the Student Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees (SAIR), which was founded by his schoolmate, Anna Kunkel. SAIR, which has chapters at four local high schools, has supported Catholic Charities by collecting household items for Welcome Baskets for refugees. SAIR also hosted a refugee speakers' panel at Seven Hills as part of Catholic Charities' Voices Project earlier this year.

"I see courage in every immigrant I meet, in their stories and in their lives," says Anna, who also teaches English

for speakers of other languages for Catholic Charities. "If other people can see that courage, too, I believe we can change perceptions for the better."

Engaging young people like Jackson and Anna is a critical part of Catholic Charities' outreach to the community, says Dan Sarell, Mission Advancement Director.

"The children are our future, but we overlook the fact that they're also our present," Dan says.

"They're contributing in very real, impactful ways in their youth. If mission-oriented agencies like Catholic Charities can build on their contributions and work with their strengths and capabilities, then our mission is, in a sense, more complete. We're investing in people who will grow into our community's leaders."

Refugee Resettlement Services Records Its Highest Numbers Ever

Catholic Charities’ Refugee Resettlement Services (RRS) had its busiest year in history, and the team remains dedicated to helping hundreds of hardworking newcomers create promising new futures for themselves here in Cincinnati in the year to come.

RRS was on track to resettle 327 newcomers in the 2024 fiscal year that ended in September — the highest number ever and an increase of 140 over last year.

RRS Director Bobbie Vunak, who joined Catholic Charities in February, has restructured her team and added staff positions with the goal of not just keeping

pace with the numbers but also providing enhanced services to our new neighbors.

Roles like a resource coordinator, housing coordinator, job developer and director of education are critical to ensuring refugees have the tools and opportunities they need to successfully integrate into the community.

Finding affordable, safe housing remains a major challenge, especially for large families that sometimes number as many as 13 people.

“We’re working to make sure we’re using every resource in the community that wants to help,” Bobbie says.

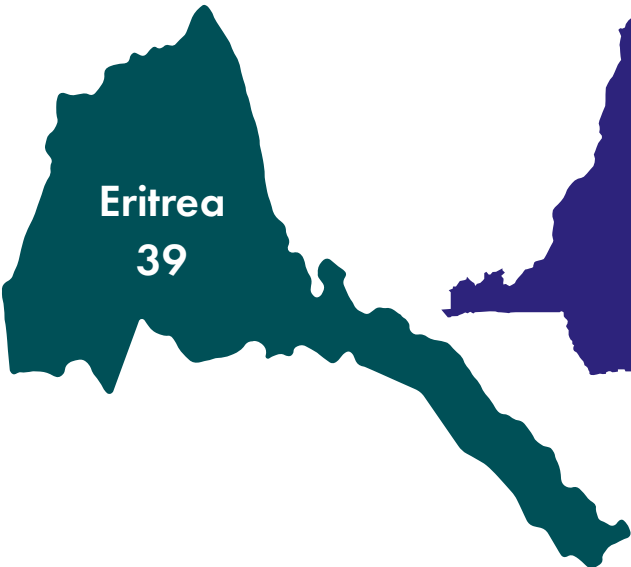
In fiscal year 2025, RRS is expecting to resettle 315 people. That number is determined by the presidential order, which means it could change depending on shifting administration priorities. Regardless, the team is moving ahead with the plan to resettle the projected number and continue to serve refugees already on RRS’ caseload.

“I have an amazing, caring, dedicated and passionate team,” Bobbie says. These dedicated staff and volunteers empower refugee families for long-term success that revitalizes communities.

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