

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Engage | Empower

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

Rising Together to Impact Our Community in 2024

Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio and Su Casa Hispanic Center made a substantial impact in 2024. We did so through a full range of local services that engaged the community in building solidarity. **Serving nearly 22,000** last year — thanks to everyone's support, we provided food assistance, senior and caregiver support, mental health counseling, family and parenting education, refugee and migrant services, and much more.

In these uncertain and challenging times, the vital work of Catholic Charities will remain strong for those in need in the year ahead. Thank you to all of our volunteers, supporters, staff and advocates, who rise together to ensure these works of mercy continue to empower families and strengthen our communities! Here are a few highlights of our impact in 2024.

Helping More Families Thrive



417,188 total meals served by Food for All in 2024. Participants unanimously report feeling more empowered to provide for themselves and their families as a result.

Welcoming & Assisting Migrants & Refugees



311 refugees were resettled this past year — a **124%** increase over last year. And **893** refugees and migrants were guided through the legal immigration process — a **150%** increase.



3,588 emergency assistance services provided by Su Casa — a **126%** increase



445 clients received life-improving mental health care through **3,837** sessions.

Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions provided **85,000** hours of service.

Catholic Charities, Archdiocese Stand in Solidarity with Immigrants

"We hope that all of you seeking asylum in this country can find in the Catholic Church a home away from home. We want to help you in any way that we can."

Those were the encouraging words of Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr during a special New Year's Day Mass at St. Joseph Parish in Springfield, a local community that found itself in the news last fall because of its growing Haitian population.

In the run-up to the November election, Haitian immigrants became the subject of false accusations and harassment. Alongside the Archdiocese, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio remains unwavering in its commitment to serving that community with love, compassion, and an enduring spirit of welcome.

"Our intentions are the same as they always have been since we started serving immigrants in 1916, when we were founded. At the heart of our mission is standing in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, whoever comes to our doors," says Chief Executive Officer Tony Stieritz. "We aim to provide a helpful response. We know we can offer support in some unique and positive ways for this community."

Catholic Charities opened an office in Springfield last spring after conducting a needs assessment there. The community expressed a strong desire to have more immigration-targeted expertise to support Haitian newcomers.

Today, Catholic Charities offers a suite of services in Springfield, including job development and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) placement; AccuracyNow interpretation services, which leverage the skills of Haitian Creole speakers; and legal services, including a full-time attorney and a case aid who assist immigrant families regardless of their country of origin.

"We did not resettle any families in Springfield," Tony says, "but we decided to adapt our services to meet the reality in front of us and to engage it with a sense of hope that we can contribute to the long term success of Springfield."

Many of the Haitians in Springfield came to the United States through the Humanitarian Parole Program (HPP) for citizens of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. HPP allowed immigrants to live and work legally in the United States for two years, during which time they could apply for consideration to remain in the country after their parole period would have expired. Changes in federal policies terminated that program, putting the future in question for thousands of people.



It's impossible to know exactly what will happen next, but one thing is certain: **With your support, Catholic Charities will continue to answer the Gospel call to 'welcome the stranger' (Matthew 25:35) with Works of Mercy, no matter what the future holds.**



"At the heart of our mission is standing in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, whoever comes to our doors."

— Catholic Charities Chief Executive Officer Tony Stieritz

This Volunteer's Dual Role Is One for the Books

Renee Garrison is one of a kind. She is the only person who volunteers as both an AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent and a Senior Companion.

Catholic Charities' Foster Grandparents program places older adult volunteers in schools and early childhood centers to serve children needing extra help. Our Senior Companion program serves seniors in independent living housing, veterans, developmentally disabled adults, as well as providing respite for caregivers in the community with hopes of the client remaining independent in their homes.

"She just truly wants to help others. For her, it's all about the impact she can make and the help she can provide," says Aaron Glauberman, Senior and Caregiver Support Services Director. "She's always willing to help, always willing to be there for others."

Renee, 68, started volunteering as a Foster Grandparent in 2017. Though she lives in Clermont County, she had no hesitation in driving all the way across Cincinnati to Lockland to help at the school. She didn't mind the distance as long as she got to work with students.

"I love kids, and I always wanted to be a schoolteacher," Renee says. "This was a way to work with kids and give back. I love meeting and being around the kids. I learn something new from them every day."

Today, Renee volunteers in the library at Immaculate Heart of Mary School on Beechmont Avenue, much closer to her home. She reads to the students, helps them find books that will interest them, and instills in the children a lifelong love of reading and learning. She's also helped the school update its collection of books to ensure children can always find something they want to read.

"If you don't read, you lose," Renee says. "Reading gives you knowledge and understanding. You can't go through life without it."

As a child, Renee didn't have access to books in her home. That inspired her to do something special during the pandemic. Knowing many children wouldn't have anything to read at home while schools were closed, **Renee donated about 2,500 books to Catholic Charities to be distributed to children and families in need.**

Renee has made a huge difference in the lives of local children, and her impact hasn't stopped there. Last year, she began volunteering as a Senior Companion, as well.

She says being around other seniors and meeting new people exposes her to new things and helps keep her active and social. She loves being on the go with her client and appreciates learning all the quick back ways to get around town. The good conversation can also be therapeutic, Renee says.

Both programs — Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions — enrich Renee's life in different and meaningful ways.

"They get me out of the house so I'm not just sitting," she says. "It's a give-and-take. I give, but I also get so much in return."



LEADERSHIP

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Archbishop of Cincinnati

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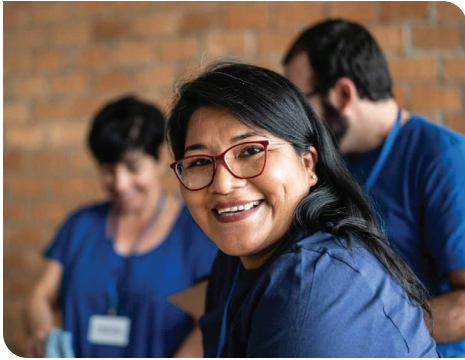
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Volunteers Needed! Will You Share Your Gifts?



Volunteers are essential to Catholic Charities' day-to-day operation and the fulfillment of our mission. Your contributions of time and talent allow us to increase services to local families and help drive lasting change in our community.

Here's where you can make a difference today:

FOOD FOR ALL

Distribution Volunteers: Help distribute food to families at mobile pantry locations in Adams, Brown, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton, and Highland counties. (The food pantry schedule is available at ccswoh.org/food-for-all.)

SU CASA HISPANIC CENTER

Health Promotions General

Volunteer: Assist our health promotions team with data entry, filing, preparing for health fairs, and assembling hygiene kits.

MARCC ID Orientations: Assist at event with reviewing paperwork, greeting attendees, and taking photos.

IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES

Volunteers with a Legal

Background: Help provide a variety of urgently needed services for immigrants.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SERVICES

Appointment Drivers: Provide transportation to refugee families for medical or social service appointments.

Furniture Donation Pickup: Participate in or assemble a crew to pick up furniture donations for refugee families. Having a truck, trailer, or van is helpful but not required.

Housing Setup and Warehouse Support: Join our housing team to deliver and set up furniture in a permanent home for newly arrived refugee families. Or, help maintain our warehouse inventory and accept donation drop-offs.

Lawncare (seasonal): Assist refugee families by shoveling snow, raking leaves, mowing lawns, and teaching them these skills. (Volunteers must provide their own tools.)

Mentors: Support a recently arrived youth or young adult to help them achieve their educational and vocational goals and promote civil and social engagement.

CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE NETWORK

Support Group Facilitator: Lead support groups and other programs for those caring for loved ones.

Peer Mentor: Support caregivers by sharing your "been there" experience, skills, and knowledge.

EDUCATION SERVICES

Vacaciones Útiles Volunteers:

Assist in 6-week summer enrichment program for low-income Hispanic/Latino children entering pre-K to 2nd grades.

ESOL & Digital Literacy: Support and lead classes.

Interested in Learning More? Explore our website at ccswoh.org to learn more about our programs. Visit our volunteer website at ccswoh.volunteerhub.com to view opportunities and create a profile.

QUESTIONS? Contact Tonia Green at 513-672-3836 or tgreen@ccswoh.org.

Smiles and Happy Tears Highlight Su Casa's Christmas Adopt-A-Family Event

On Saturday, December 14, Su Casa Hispanic Center hosted its annual Christmas Adopt-A-Family event at Hartwell Elementary School.

With help from Procter & Gamble, Fifth Third Bank, Sims-Lohman, First Commonwealth Bank, and Catholic Charities supporters like you, **235 children got to unwrap Christmas presents they otherwise would not have received.**

Children also got to enjoy free food and drinks and visits with their favorite superheroes, while their parents were given baskets of culturally relevant food items to take home for the entire family.

For Su Casa Hispanic Center's New Director Hector Cruz, seeing the smiles on children's faces was the best part of the event. The happy tears of their grateful parents moved him, as well.



"God bless you. You are angels for us. We appreciate what you do for me and my family," one gentleman attending the event shared. "It's a blessing and a privilege for me to be part of this activity."

Hector is already looking ahead to next Christmas. He plans to begin identifying and recruiting families this summer to



make the biggest impact possible on the families we serve.

"I'm excited to keep working on this event for our Su Casa clients he says. "I'm looking forward to working together with our sponsors and volunteers again and doing our best for this event in 2025."

Muchas Gracias! Su Casa and Catholic Charities extend a special thanks to the sponsors, volunteers, staff, and generous supporters who helped bring the Christmas spirit alive for local children.

Family Development Services Expands to Impact More Children and Families

Experts who have worked in child development for decades are seeing a worrisome trend: Young children's social skills are lagging. Classrooms that used to have one disruptive child now have three to five.

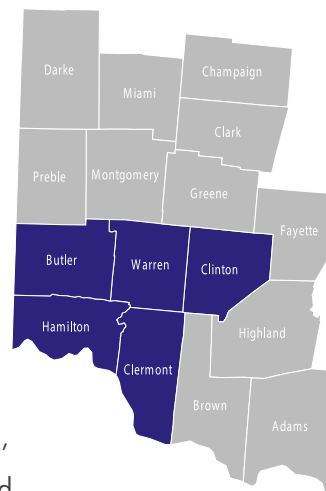
"This is just a different world for childcare centers and schools," says Pam Mortensen, Family Development Services Director. "We're prepared to continue to dig in and support the people caring for these kids."

A grant from The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) has allowed Catholic Charities to expand its services from Butler County to Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton, and Warren. With the grant, Pam's team was able to hire two more consultants who will work with 4C for Children to build their capacity to train childcare providers on early childhood mental health and social emotional learning (SEL).

Pam has long wanted to expand her team's services to help more childcare providers and, ultimately, more children and families. She was honored that DCY reached out to her because of Catholic Charities' strong reputation and history of excellent outcomes.

She is especially passionate about promoting SEL with young children. Mindfulness and calming activities help children build empathy for others, manage their emotions, and grow into caring, compassionate people.

"I think of it as building friendship skills," she says. "It's about stopping



and paying attention to the other human being who's in front of you. If young children don't develop these skills, they become school-aged children who struggle with friendships."

Pam hopes this expansion is only the first step into greater growth for Catholic Charities' early childhood mental health and parenting programs. Last year, the team added two parenting

classes in Spanish, and the plan in 2025 calls for three six-week programs.

Supporters like you help make it possible for Catholic Charities to push past boundaries and reach more children and families with life-changing programs. Thank you!

New Services Help Meet Our Community's Growing Mental Health Needs



With support from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation and the Millstone Fund, Catholic Charities recently hired a new Mental Health Specialist focused on therapeutic behavioral services, behavioral coaching, and case management.

Onexi Alvarado, a Venezuelan native who earned her bachelor's in psychology in Mexico, works primarily with Spanish-speaking clients to help them "make some of the changes they want to make for themselves," says Laura Hershberger, Mental Health Services Director.

That includes teaching mindfulness and stress-tolerance skills to help people manage emotions in the moment. Onexi's approach is goal-focused to support long-term behavioral change.

Onexi is also piloting an anger management course made possible by a grant from the Community Leaders Institute.

The new services allow Catholic Charities to take a more comprehensive approach to providing care that meets the different levels of need within the community. For people who don't need therapy or who are on a therapist's waitlist, behavioral services give them practical tools

they can use to live better and foster healthy relationships. For those who are already in therapy, behavioral coaching complements that work.

In one case, a client came to Catholic Charities struggling with anxiety and anger.

The therapist who assessed the client didn't have availability, but Onexi was able to step in in the meantime. She helped the client with deep breathing, noticing and naming their anger, identifying triggers, and understanding the impact of alcohol use. Once the therapist's schedule opened up, the client was in a better position to focus on processing the past traumas that had led to the emotional and behavioral issues they had been experiencing.

"Behavior coaching is helping people make change; therapy helps people understand why things are going on," Laura says. "It works well together."

As our community's needs grow and change, Mental Health Services is committed to providing new opportunities for neighbors to strengthen their mental and emotional health. Your support helps ensure every individual and family has what they need to thrive.

When someone is dealing with a mental health issue, every second counts. That's why Catholic Charities' Mental Health Services team is developing innovative new solutions to provide a wider range of care to more people, at a time when waitlists are only growing longer.



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The Community Comes Together in Service

A community is defined by how it cares for its most vulnerable people, and Greater Cincinnati is proving itself to be a place of great compassion and generosity.

In recent months, a number of local parishes, faith communities, and schools have partnered with Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio to reach out to our neighbors in need. Here are a few highlights:

Good Shepherd Parish in Montgomery continued its annual tradition of collecting coats, hats, gloves, and scarves that are critically needed — and deeply appreciated — by newcomers to our area.

The donation drive in January 2025 yielded 882 coats that benefited Catholic Charities' clients.

This winter, generous parishioners started donating even earlier, which allowed us to distribute cozy winter clothing to Su Casa and Refugee Resettlement clients in the office and to pantry participants during a Food for All pantry distribution at St. Joseph Church in the West End.

"When I went to pick them up in December, I had so many coats, I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to fit all the bags in the vans," says Mary Anne Bressler, Parish & Community Engagement Coordinator.

What a wonderful "problem" to have!

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has also continued its longtime friendship with Catholic Charities.

In addition to church members consistently volunteering at Food for All pantries, the LDS church invited Catholic Charities to be part of a ministry fair during its service day in November in Lakeside Park, Ky.

A number of volunteers are fluent in a second language, and several of them expressed interest in volunteering with our refugee and immigrant communities. Participants regularly offered thanks for the work that Catholic Charities does and for the chance to partner with us.



"There's just such a warm relationship," Mary Anne says. "They're steadfast supporters of the work that we do. It's really phenomenal."

St. Ursula Academy is also a steadfast supporter of Catholic Charities. In recent years, students have participated in various volunteer activities for Su Casa. "They've been very interested and supportive," Mary Anne says. Last fall, students from two Spanish classes visited Su Casa to learn more about the ways in which we serve the Spanish-speaking community and to pack hygiene bags for a health fair. In January, 2025, a group of students used T-shirts to make special tote bags for our food pantries.

Moeller High School continues its support of Catholic Charities. On February 10, four students volunteered as part of the school's

Magnified Giving program. In two hours, the young men sorted and boxed up 15 large bags of coats, hats, gloves and scarves. These will be distributed to the refugee and immigrant families that we serve in our community.

"I really appreciate these young men coming in on a day off from school to assist us here at Catholic Charities," Mary Anne says.



Learn More

If you are interested in participating with Catholic Charities through works of mercy, contact Mary Anne Bressler at mbressler@ccswoh.org

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Warren, Brown, Adams, Highland, Clinton,
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*"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall
obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)*

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Helping Families Thrive in Southwestern Ohio



CATHOLIC CHARITIES SOUTHWESTERN OHIO moved nearly 22,000
people from crisis to stability and self-sufficiency in 2024.

We do so by providing a wide range of local services that help families thrive,
including senior and caregiver support, mental health counseling, family and
parenting education, migrant and refugee assistance, and much more.

**To learn more about the programs and the other works of mercy
Catholic Charities provides, visit our website at ccswoh.org.**