

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Engage | Empower

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

Celebrating Courage and Community on World Refugee Day

On Saturday, June 14, the spirit of resilience, unity, and joy filled the air at the P&G MLB Reds Youth Academy as Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, RefugeeConnect, and Kentucky Refugee Ministries came together to celebrate **World Refugee Day** in Cincinnati. The event welcomed over **135 former refugees** and **60 dedicated volunteers** for an afternoon brimming with food, festivities, and the vibrant expressions of dozens of cultures.

A highlight of the celebration was the inspiring Parade of Nations, where attendees proudly carried the flags of their homelands. As a special treat, Rosie Red and a crowd of refugee children ushered in the United States flag to the center of the parade—a beautiful tribute to the journeys they've made and the diversity they now share with our city. From traditional garments to dancing, shared meals to storytelling, the day served as a joyful reminder of the strength and contributions of those rebuilding their lives in safety.

Since 1980, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio has stood alongside refugees as they begin anew. In the past year alone, we've welcomed more than 300 individuals and families from around the world. Although federal policy has paused new refugee admissions, our work has not stopped. Through programs in **case management, workforce development, immigration legal services, and mental health support**, we remain steadfast in our commitment to those who've recently arrived.

World Refugee Day is marked around the globe to honor people forced to flee war, persecution, or violence. In Cincinnati, it's also a day to celebrate the extraordinary ways refugees continue to enrich and strengthen our community. It is our blessing and responsibility to offer hospitality, opportunity, and belonging as our newest neighbors take their next steps.

As we reflect on this moving day, we also renew our promise: to walk with, advocate for, and uplift those who have endured so much—and have so much to share.



Mental Health Services: Support Beyond the Therapy Room

LEADERSHIP

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Archbishop of Cincinnati

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When Isabella* walked through the doors of Catholic Charities' Mental Health Services, she was carrying more than any teenager should. Living with foster parents and raising a child while attending high school, Isabella faced a complex set of challenges. She needed more than just therapy—she needed a lifeline.

Mental Health Therapist Deliana Peralta Fuentes offered that lifeline with compassion and creativity. Her approach goes beyond traditional counseling. "I approach therapy through a social work lens. I'm not a case manager, but I try to be there in all aspects, not just in the psychotherapy piece," Deliana says. "I make sure that what we're learning in therapy is connected to resources outside of the therapy room."

From day one, Deliana provided counseling tailored to Isabella's needs—but she didn't stop there. She helped Isabella access food pantries, apply for Medicaid, and obtain basic parenting necessities like a crib and baby clothes. She also connected her to parenting classes, advocacy programs, and a wide variety of wraparound services through Catholic Charities.

Isabella's story is a powerful reminder that mental health care doesn't happen in isolation. It happens through relationships, resources, and the support of a caring community. Isabella not only received therapeutic guidance—she was empowered to thrive.

This past spring, Isabella proudly graduated from high school. With continued support from Catholic Charities and friends like you, she is now preparing to attend college and further her education. She's also spending more



quality time with her family, connecting with supportive services, and planning to live independently—milestones that reflect her growth, resilience, and readiness for the next chapter.

She will continue receiving mental health services as she navigates this important life transition, ensuring that her foundation remains strong.

Thank you for investing in the future of our community's youth. Your support goes far beyond today—it creates ripple effects that last for generations.

**Name changed for privacy.*

"I make sure that what we're learning in therapy is connected to resources outside of the therapy room." — Deliana Peralta

Fuentes, Mental Health Therapist

Trafficking Survivor Finally Can Live Her Life out of the Shadows

For four long years, Julie* was hidden away under lock and key, betrayed by a family friend.

The “friend” had posted bond for her when she was detained by immigration officials after arriving in the United States from Guatemala in 2001. But his intent was never to help the vulnerable woman. Instead, he held her captive and trafficked her to other men.

Julie was just 20 years old. She spoke no English and had never been taught to read or write. After years of suffering, she managed to escape with the aid of a neighbor, only to find herself trapped in a different way: She had no legal status in the United States, and her former captor threatened to harm her family in Guatemala if she returned home.

She lived in the shadows for nearly 20 years until Catholic Charities shined the light of hope into her life!

Julie walked into the Immigration Legal Services office simply looking for information on immigration. After Staff Attorney Stephany Martinez learned the details of her story — coercion, fraud, sexual exploitation — she recognized that Julie was a survivor of trafficking and could be eligible for a T Visa, that is, a pathway to legal residency.

“A lot of clients don’t know they’ve been trafficked,” Stephany says. “I have to explain to them how what they’ve been through falls into that category. No one ever calls and says, ‘Hey, I was trafficked.’”

Stephany worked tirelessly with Julie to chronicle details and dates to strengthen her case. Next, Stephany helped Julie file a report with the Cincinnati Police Department, as required for the special visa. The final paperwork was submitted to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services in 2023.

Recently, Julie’s case was approved! She was granted T1 status, which allows her to work legally and receive certain benefits. In 2027, she’ll be able to apply for a green card.

Today, she’s learning how to speak English and how to read and write. She’s also receiving care from Catholic Charities’ Mental Health Services so she can work through the trauma that was brought to the surface during her visa application process.

“Once I was able to call her and tell her it was approved, it was a huge feeling of relief,” Stephany says. “I’ve been able to give her peace of mind. It’s very gratifying.”



Thanks to Stephany and supporters like you, Julie can finally live her life in the light, with the dignity and security she’s always deserved.

**Name changed for privacy.*

“There are little victories in this job. They’re very rewarding. They give you fuel to keep going even when there’s so much that’s changing.” — Stephany Martinez,
Immigration Legal Services Staff Attorney



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Su Casa Health Fair Serves a Community in Growing Need



As our immigrant neighbors face increasing challenges and uncertainty, Su Casa Hispanic Center continues to step up for the community with the generous support of friends like you and our committed community partners.

Su Casa held its annual Spring Health Fair on April 6 at St. Julie Billiart Parish in Hamilton. **More than 700 people** received valuable health services and education.

The health fair offered vision and mammography screenings, medical screenings and consultations, as well as the distribution of bicycles, bike helmets, yoga mats, soccer balls, jump ropes, cleaning supplies, and hygiene items to help people stay active and enhance their well-being.

"My heart is with the community," says Sara Obando, Health Promotion Supervisor. "They need us more than ever."

Because the community needs Su Casa and Catholic Charities more than ever, the support of community partners, volunteers, and compassionate donors like you is vitally important.

"From my heart, and on behalf of the Su Casa Health Promotion team, we're extremely grateful that our community partners have been supporting our program year after year," Sara says. "They always come through. They are putting people first."

To learn more about Su Casa Hispanic Center and the services it provides to the Hispanic/Latino community in Greater Cincinnati, visit sucasaohio.org/en.



THANK YOU!

Our Spring Health Fair would not have been possible without our devoted community partners:

- 1N5
- 4C for Children
- AmeriHealth Caritas Ohio
- Breast and Cervical Cancer Project
- Butler County WIC program
- CAIN Free Clinic
- Cancer Support Community
- Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
- Council on Aging
- Cris Collinsworth ProScan
- Dedicated Senior Medical Center
- Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati
- Housing Opportunity Made Equal
- Mercy Health
- Molina Healthcare
- Network for Hope
- Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities
- Pink Ribbon Good
- Prevent Blindness Ohio
- Primary Health Solution
- Procter & Gamble
- UC Health
- WinMed Health Services



Amid Funding Cuts and Higher Prices, “Food for All” Is Calling on Us All



Government funding cuts have impacted Catholic Charities’ ability to serve our neighbors through our Food for All pantries. We need the support of caring friends like you to help bridge the gap.

The cuts have come at a time when rising food prices already were stretching the budget. **In 2024, Food for All was able to purchase twice the amount of food for the same amount of money being spent now.**

On top of that, in March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture cut funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in Ohio, impacting food banks and local farmers. Specifically, \$500 million in TEFAP funding was frozen, and the Local Food Purchase Assistance program, which funded \$500 million annually for food banks, was canceled. Locally, that means that items that had been accessible

for free are now available only for purchase. And the few donated items that can be ordered for free are being sought by over 500 other pantries.

Many of our vulnerable brothers and sisters aren’t getting the nutritious food they need.

“This food really matters to people,” says April Hoak, Food for All Coordinator. “Sometimes, they have to make a choice to pay another bill instead of buying groceries. We fill that gap for people. They are grateful for whatever we can give them.”

Food for All hosts six pantry distributions each month in Adams, Brown, Clermont, Clinton, and Highland Counties, as well as at St. Joseph Catholic Church in the West End.

Guests in the rural counties east of Cincinnati often come from senior-

led families in which grandparents are raising their grandchildren. It’s not uncommon to see older military veterans who proudly wear “Vietnam Vet” and other patriotic clothes to the pantries.

At one recent distribution, guests who used to receive 20 or more items received just nine. That’s despite increased food spending for the three largest pantries.

Normally at this time of year, Food for All guests are blessed with abundant fresh produce — everything from ripe, juicy watermelon to a variety of colorful vegetables. But this year, nutritious fruits and veggies are among the most difficult items to acquire.

Despite the challenges, Catholic Charities remains committed to serving those in need. Your support is vital to our ability to feed our community, nourishing our neighbors in both body and spirit.

FEEDING THE HUNGRY

In 2024, Food for All (FFA) served ...

376,665
meals in five rural
counties

3,074
families and 8,247 individuals
in those same counties

31,703
meals through our Produce Pantry
at St. Joseph in the West End

Want to help? Please consider making a gift at ccswoh.org/donate.

Nearly 60 Years of Service: Catholic Charities' AmeriCorps Seniors Programs Deliver Results



Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio has operated two effective and cost-efficient AmeriCorps Seniors programs for nearly 60 years. The Foster Grandparents Program places older, low-income adult volunteers in schools and early childhood centers to serve children needing extra help. The Senior Companions Program likewise places volunteers into community service by helping other

low-income, older adults remain independent in their homes and assisting with daily activities, respite and transportation.

In 2024 alone, **148 older adults** received in-home support from Senior Companions, helping them maintain independence and dignity; **308 children** benefitted from the steady presence and mentorship of Foster Grandparents in local classrooms. Thanks to their efforts, **91% of seniors** showed improvements in independent living, and **89% of students** demonstrated academic growth.

These numbers tell a powerful story—but the real impact lies in the lives touched and the bonds formed. Whether it's offering a helping hand at home or

patient guidance in the classroom, our AmeriCorps Seniors are building a more connected, compassionate community.

Robin Jones, a dedicated AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent with Catholic Charities, has become a cherished presence in the halls of Evanston Academy Elementary School. First

graders eagerly greet her each day, calling her "grandma" with affection and excitement as she enters the classroom. She enjoys seeing the children she mentors grow academically every day.

Reflecting on her experience with the program Robin shares, "There were students when I first came—maybe their reading level was low—but by the end of the year, they had reached higher goals than I had ever anticipated. I can't emphasize how important this program is, because it's needed. It is needed. I can say that over and over again."

Robin says the news of the program's probable closure has taken a mental and physical toll, and students will lose out on valuable resources.

As we share this message, the future of AmeriCorps Seniors federal funding remains unclear. But one thing is certain—our commitment to walking beside these incredible volunteers and the lives they touch will never waver. We'll do everything we can to keep their light shining in our community.

Teens 'Advocating for Life' by Focusing on Mental Health

Today's high school students are facing a mountain of challenges, from school violence and the aftermath of a global pandemic to the daily pressures of social media and ever-present technology.

It's no surprise that teens from throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati are eager to learn about the variety of mental health services that Catholic Charities offers for young people.

"For them, in some ways, **advocating for mental health is advocating for life,**" says Mary Anne Bressler, Parish & Community Engagement Coordinator.

Mary Anne recently spoke to the Catholic Social Action Youth Council.

The local high school students were especially interested in Teen Mental Health First Aid, a peer-to-peer program designed to equip teens to identify the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges. The program also empowers young people to talk to their peers who might be struggling.

For the students, learning Teen Mental Health First Aid is a way they can make an immediate impact in their schools, communities, and even at home.

"Mental health awareness feels like a movement in general, but especially with teens," Mary Anne says. "There's that sense that it's important and it's urgent and we need to be doing something about it."

Mary Anne, who is certified to teach Teen Mental Health First Aid, is working to introduce the awareness classes to Greater Cincinnati area schools.



Interested in Learning More?

To learn more about Mental Health First Aid programs for teens and adults, please contact Mary Anne Bressler at mbressler@ccswoh.org or 513-672-3714.

Catholic Charities Invests in Children by Educating Parents



The best way to invest in a community's future is by investing in its children today.

Catholic Charities' Family Development Services offers a variety of evidence-based parenting education programs that have been proven to build skills in parents so they can empower their children to thrive.

"The costs of inadequate parenting and failures to address problems in family life are high," says Pam Mortensen, Family Development Services Director. "The long-term costs are measured in school drop-outs, unemployment, delinquency, and intergenerational poverty.

"Parenting education programs can help parents gain critical parenting and problem-solving skills that prevent abuse, strengthen families, and improve the well-being of children."

Here's a look at Catholic Charities' offerings for parents and teens:

Parenting Education Classes

This six-week course helps parents with children under 12 increase their knowledge of child development, develop discipline skills, and improve their relationship with their children. Parents learn to foster growth in their children so they achieve success in school and life.

The Parent Project®

The 10-week program uses social-emotional learning strategies to help parents foster positive connections with their children (ages 11-17) and address their kids' behavioral and mental health issues. Parents learn to confront destructive behaviors and provide emotional and practical support for their children.

Loving Solutions

Loving Solutions adapts the Parent Project® curriculum to the needs of parents with children ages 5-10. The goal is to prevent challenging behaviors.

WhyTry

This program aims to decrease rule-breaking behaviors in children ages 11-17 and improve their mental health and performance in school. Children participate in WhyTry at the same time their parents attend the Parent Project.

Need Parenting Support?

Catholic Charities' parenting programs are open to any parent with children whose ages and needs align with the respective classes. The six-week Parenting Education Classes are taught in English and Spanish. For other programs, interpreters are available.

For more information, call (513) 867-7063.



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"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall
obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

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please contact Spring Duncan at 513-672-3736
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SU CASA GALA 2025: WE RISE WITH HOPE

**Join us Friday, September 19 for an
inspiring evening of celebration and impact.**

Together, we will rise in support of the growing needs of our Hispanic/Latino
community and invite our guests to join our mission for resiliency and empowerment.
We stand in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors who are working tirelessly toward
self-sufficiency—and your presence makes a difference.

The Bell Event Centre
444 Reading Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

6:00 PM – Reception with appetizers and drinks
7:00 PM – Dinner, presentation, and live appeal
9:00 PM – After party with DJ and dancing

WE RISE WITH
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