

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Enlighten | Empower

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

Serving Local Families, Empowering Local Lives in 2020

To all of our volunteers and supporters, thank you for your service to the most vulnerable families in our region. Please continue to pray, learn, volunteer and donate to support the urgent work of Catholic Charities.



26,029

People served in 2020

FEEDING THE HUNGRY



743,282

Meals served in 2020
by all Food for All programs



11,868

Families served



+ 46%

Meals provided
in rural mobile pantries

STRENGTHENING THE FAMILIES



814

Children received
**Early Childhood Mental
Health consultations**



+356%

Individuals received
Health Assessments

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE



2,975

mental health counseling
sessions provided
(+14% from last year)

Gladys was disappointed when she couldn't return to her school as a Catholic Charities' Foster Grandparent due to the pandemic. But, through online video chat, she was able to mentor a young man who arrived in Cincinnati as a refugee from Central Africa.

WELCOMING THE STRANGER



311

People enrolled in **online
education** courses



110

Children participated in
summer enrichment and
tutoring programs



2,156

Migrants & refugees received
emergency assistance



477

**Immigration legal
services** provided



Immigration Legal Services Program Helps Welcome Samuel and His Family



Samuel is new to Cincinnati, but he's all too familiar with being considered a stranger.

Born and raised in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Samuel lived in fear of being persecuted for his ethnic heritage as a Banyamulenge Congolese. When he participated in a peaceful protest against the DRC's government, his fears became reality.

Samuel's own neighbors reported him to the police. Then, in a horrifying turn, those same neighbors — people Samuel had known his whole life — tortured him, burning Samuel's feet and cutting them with machetes.

"People he grew up with started betraying him," said Victor Bugandwana, Department of Justice Full Accredited Representative in Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services Program. "Samuel came here with a lot of scars."

Samuel had no choice but to flee the DRC. After a grueling trek through 11 countries, he and his family entered the United States through the Eagle Pass, Texas, port of entry and expressed their intent to apply for asylum.

In September 2018, a migrant support agency in Texas, Casa Marianella, contacted Sister Sandy Howe with the Sisters of Charity to see if they would

receive the family. They traveled by bus from Texas to the Greyhound station in Cincinnati, where S. Sandy picked them up. In the days that followed, she connected them to Catholic Charities.

Victor spoke with the family and ensured they met the criteria for affirmative asylum. He then built the legal case, prepared all the paperwork, and sent it to government officials. In late 2019, Victor and S. Sandy accompanied Samuel and his family to Chicago for their asylum interview, during which they detailed the danger they would face if they were forced to return home.

Thankfully, the family was granted asylum on Dec. 1, 2020, a year after their interview.

While the family waited, they learned English through Catholic Charities' ESOL program. Catholic Charities also helped Samuel and his wife secure employment cards, so they could get jobs, and assisted them in applying for pandemic relief until they could work.

Today, Samuel and his wife are employed and they look forward to bringing Samuel's three older children to the United States. With ongoing support from the Sisters of Charity and Catholic Charities, thousands of miles from the land of his birth, Samuel finally has found a place where he truly belongs.

Are you interested in supporting asylum seekers like Samuel? Visit ccswoh.org/programs/refugee-resettlement-services to learn how you can help!

Young Refugees Stand Side by Side with Volunteers to Fight Hunger in Adams County



Recently, two Catholic Charities programs met in a deeply meaningful way when youth from the Refugee Resettlement Youth Mentoring Program were able to give back to their new community by volunteering with the Food for All program to serve their neighbors in Adams County.

"They jumped right in," said April Hoak, Food for All Coordinator. "Such generosity with their spirit, with their love, with their wanting to be part of the community here. It's such a beautiful thing. You see friendships form. You see people with their hearts open to each other."

The partnership is part of the Youth Mentoring Program's mission to help young refugees experience positive civic and social engagement in their new communities. It also introduced the newcomers, who live primarily in the city, to a rural portion of Greater Cincinnati.

"One of the ways for someone to become more civically engaged is to find volunteer opportunities," explained Donald Foley, the Youth Mentoring Coordinator. "It's a great opportunity for the youth to give back to the community that has embraced them through their transition to their new life in the United States."

It also helps boost the young volunteers' self-esteem and sense of purpose.

"It's a great experience meeting new people, doing good things. Being a part of something special is good," said Celestin, a native of the Democratic Republic of Congo and one of the youth participants.

Added Upshana, a youth mentee from Nepal: "I'm so happy because I do this work and I hope I will do it again. Today I feel so good, because other people helped me and I help them."

The Refugee Youth Mentoring program connects young people, ages 15-24, with a volunteer adult mentor who supports their educational and vocational advancement. For the mentees, volunteering for Food for All was an opportunity to meet more people in the community, helping them build connections beyond their mentors.

"The introduction to American adults that the youth typically have little interaction with outside of the mentoring meetings has been a really great aspect," says Donald. "And the adult Food for All volunteers were so excited to hear about the countries the youth had lived in and to hear about their cultures and how they continue to celebrate their cultures while living in the United States."



If you are interested in learning more or becoming a mentor, contact Donald Foley at dfoley@ccswoh.org.

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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: Florence McCray, AccuracyNow Language Services Administrative Assistant

Make a Difference in the Lives of Senior Citizens and Caregivers



Catholic Charities created AccuracyNow Language Services in 2017 as a social enterprise to bridge the language gap in Cincinnati. Its mission is to help non-English speakers communicate with providers to access medical, legal, conference, education and social services. Offering services in 132 languages, AccuracyNow provides employment opportunities for many of the refugees we resettle here. All profits go directly back into Catholic Charities programs.

When AccuracyNow experienced an increase in clients in 2019, Program Director Litz Main needed to expand her team. Florence McCray joined AccuracyNow from Catholic Charities' Senior and Caregiver Support Services, and despite working only a few hours a week, she made her presence felt immediately.

"With seeing how well Florence performed every task we assigned her and her eagerness to assist beyond our initial expectations, it made it easy for me to offer her a position as the administrative assistant," Litz said.

Today, Florence is a vital part of the rapidly growing AccuracyNow program — and

the entire team feels blessed to have her on board.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES: How did you first come to Catholic Charities?

FLORENCE: I had just had a life tragedy; I lost my daughter, and I had my grandson, who was 16. I needed to get some structure back into our life, so I went looking for a job. VANTAGE Aging placed me at Catholic Charities. I came here as a volunteer because I was getting paid by the Department of Labor.

When I started, I was stuffing envelopes and doing general office-type things. But I needed something more to push myself, so I started asking, "What else have you got? Do you have anything else I can do?" Eventually, I worked my way into the fiber of what they were doing — I kind of just grew on them.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES: What do you like about working on the AccuracyNow team?

FLORENCE: We're growing; we're doing things we need to do. I like the idea that we're raising this baby from day one. We're looking forward to growing more and being competitive with the big interpreter services here in the city.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES: Tell us a bit about your background before you came to Catholic Charities.

FLORENCE: I started my career in corporate America. Then I wanted to be a chef, so I went to Cincinnati State for culinary school. My first job as a chef, I went to Venice on Vine as the chef instructor/restaurant manager. I combined my two careers, and it was a really great job. But I'm diabetic and I was always on my feet, so I had some health issues. I still wanted to be up and active and working, so going back to corporate life gave me a chance to do that.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES: What else would you like people to know about your experience with Catholic Charities and AccuracyNow?

FLORENCE: It's been a personal growing experience, because it expands my mind-set. I'm not leaving the city, but the world is coming to me. There are so many different languages I didn't even realize existed — dialects, pronunciations. I like talking with people, learning to listen and understand their cultures.

And working for Litz has been fantastic. I admire her very much. She takes personal interest in and care of each of us. She's there for the team, and she's always stressing this is a team effort. I want to be just like her when I grow up!

"With seeing how well Florence performed every task we assigned her and her eagerness to assist beyond our initial expectations, it made it easy for me to offer her a position as the administrative assistant," Litz said.

To learn more about AccuracyNow Language Services, visit accuracynow.com

At Catholic Charities, we treasure our seniors and the volunteers who enable us to care for them the way they deserve. Currently, we are seeking volunteers for our newest program, Heart of Mary Respite & Companion Services.

"Heart of Mary was developed to meet an urgent need in the community," said Stephanie Slack, Senior Community Engagement Coordinator.

Program volunteers will provide in-home non-medical support for seniors, offering socialization and a caring presence for older adults while allowing caregivers well-deserved time for rest and self-care.

Currently, the program is making reassurance phone calls to seniors to check on them and let them know they are not alone. A phone call might seem like a small gesture, but it means the world to seniors like Monica, especially during these isolating pandemic days.

"I am thankful for my volunteer's phone calls," Monica shared. "She is a blessing. Her phone calls inspire me."

Enrich your life as well as the lives of others by offering much-needed support to seniors!



Safe, flexible, remote, or in-person opportunities are available with varying levels of commitment. All volunteers will receive training and support. Join us in our mission to serve, enlighten, and empower.

For more information, please contact Stephanie Slack at 513-535-2291 or apply online at ccswoh.org/heart-of-mary-respite-and-companion-services/

Praying in Solidarity

Join us every Monday at 11:00 AM for our Praying in Solidarity weekly prayer on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CatholicCharitiesSWOhio. We welcome your prayer intentions by visiting our website at www.ccswoh.com, and they will be included with those gathered across the community.

Volunteer to help lead online prayer services ...

If you enjoy leading prayer, lecturing in Church, public speaking, and have availability occasionally on Monday mornings from 10:30 - 11:30, we would love to speak with you about helping lead Praying in Solidarity services.

If you would like to learn more about volunteering for this ministry, contact Mary Anne Bressler at mbressler@ccswoh.org.





Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: A Fresh Start for Kids and Families



Larry is a bright, energetic 5-year-old, and his mother, Jessica, has adored him since adopting him when he was very young. But when Larry ran from his daycare center and across a busy street, Jessica knew she

needed help keeping her son safe and healthy.

Larry's birth mother had battled addiction. Born with positive toxicology, Larry began to struggle with impulse control and aggression as he got older. Yet when Jessica applied for mental health services through Larry's school, she was denied.

That's when Catholic Charities got involved — and helped change everything for this family!

Maribel Gonzalez, an Early Childhood Mental Health consultant, helped Jessica reapply for the support her son needed. Together, they got Larry accepted into the Camelot Project, a mental health services program involved with Larry's school. In

addition, Catholic Charities developed a plan of services with the school to help Larry have all his needs met while at school and to keep him safe within the building.

"I really admire and respect Jessica," Maribel said. "She does all she can to make sure her son will succeed."

Now, Larry's issues are under control, and the little boy has the resources he needs to thrive.

"I was happy to have Maribel standing by my side throughout this journey," Jessica said. "Larry wouldn't be where he is today without her assistance. Having Maribel present during the process helped me feel secure and supported."

To learn more about Catholic Charities' family and parenting services, including Early Childhood Mental Health, visit ccswoh.org/programs/family-parenting-services or call 513-867-7063.

After 37 Years of Dead Ends and Frustration, Tamara Finds Hope through Catholic Charities

Imagine having to prove you exist.

That is the challenge that faces Americans like Tamara Marquez who, because a paper was never filed when she was an infant, never had a birth certificate.

Without this simple piece of paper, Tamara could not obtain a Real ID.

"I'm at the end of my emotional rope over this," Tamara said when she reached out to Catholic Charities in December. "During this pandemic, I have struggled to find work. I applied for benefits, for food, and was required to prove my birth to get the benefit. I was unable to do that and was unable to get any help."

Tamara was placed for adoption in the early 1960s. She was adopted by her new parents at the Kenton County (Ky.) courthouse, but the Cincinnati Department of Vital Statistics believed her adoption

paperwork was never filed. Complicating her quest further, her adoptive parents died when Tamara was 12 years old. She began pursuing a birth certificate in 1983, without any success.

When Tamara reached out shortly before Christmas, she felt Catholic Charities was her last hope. She was put in touch with Debbie Melucci, our post-adoption social worker. Debbie immediately began an exhaustive search for Tamara's file, praying she would be able to help Tamara end this decades-long trial.

Like Tamara, Debbie was met with one dead end after another but refused to give up. As a last-ditch effort, she contacted a Kentucky social worker, and finally, Debbie's and Tamara's prayers were answered. The social worker found Tamara's adoption files!



"She said she feels like she now has hope," Debbie said of Tamara.

For Tamara, it is a dream come true, and she is so thankful for Debbie's dedication and the support of Catholic Charities.

Su Casa Creates Brighter Futures for Immigrant Families



Whether it's securing a new mattress for a child with a disability, offering financial help for an expectant mother, or providing countless services in between, Su Casa Hispanic Center provides pathways for Hispanic/Latino families to better their lives.

In December, Su Casa converted its annual Christmas Adopt-A-Family Program to a drive-through model and distributed gifts,



personal protective equipment, and household cleaning products to more than 200 families.

Corporate sponsors included Procter & Gamble, A Brighter Day Farm, and Fifth Third Bank.

Through Adopt-A-Family, several Fifth Third team members came together to purchase a new mattress and box spring for Khristian, a young boy with cerebral palsy.

"Thank you for all you have done for our child," Khristian's parents said. "He sleeps so much better now!"

Of course, special events aren't the only way Su Casa serves the growing Spanish-speaking community. Team members like Bilingual Case Manager Yudi Escobar Leon are hard at work each day to meet the community's needs, including providing emergency assistance for moms like Natalia.



Natalia was unable to work much of last year while her son battled sickle cell anemia. When her son passed away in December, Natalia not only was stricken with grief, but overwhelmed by bills and financial concerns.

Yudi helped Natalia manage her past-due utility bills and her son's funeral expenses. She's also supporting Natalia through her current pregnancy.

"Thank you, Su Casa, for helping me through these tough times," Natalia said. "I'm not sure what I would have done without your help."

For more information about Su Casa, visit ccswoh.org/programs/su-casa-hispanic-center-services or call 513-761-1588.

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

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Southwestern Ohio, please contact Spring
Duncan at 513-672-3736 or sduncan@ccswoh.
org to be removed from our mailing list.*



Register today for the 2021 Su Casa Virtual Gala

Su Casa Hispanic Center, a program of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, serves local families and empowers local lives through emergency assistance, case management, family reunification, education, and health promotion services.

**Join us for Su Casa's Annual Awards Gala,
livestreamed via Catholic Charities' website on
Thursday, May 6 at 7:00 PM.**

- Learn how Su Casa serves the Hispanic/Latino community
- Celebrate our community partners
- Bid on gift baskets
- Support our appeal
- And order up a margarita, chips and salsa kit prior to the event



**Construyendo Una Comunidad
Acogedora Para Todos**

The event is
FREE to attend.

TO REGISTER, VISIT
ccswoh.org/su-casa-virtual-gala/