

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Engage | Empower

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

Catholic Charities Serves and Empowers Local Families in Need in 2023



19,678 SERVED



825 VOLUNTEERS

The Impact We Make Together

On behalf of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, thank you for being a part of the team that served and empowered nearly twenty-thousand people last year! This would not have been possible without the volunteerism, donations and prayers of thousands of supporters, like you, who are dedicated to helping neighbors thrive in mind, body and spirit. I hope you enjoy reflecting on the stories and statistics in this issue of Blessings that give you a glimpse of the impact we made together.



This year, we expect to help even more families thrive across our 11-county service area. Among other things, we are expanding our work for caregivers, so that more people caring for sick and elderly loved ones can receive resources as well as emotional and spiritual support.

We are also extending our Family Development Services to a number of new counties, including our eastern, rural communities. As a result, our Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation team will be equipping more families, daycare providers and early learning centers with professional development on children's social-emotional growth and healthy family relations. There will also be greater access in these areas for parenting education programs.

In Springfield, we are excited to be opening new offices, where we will initially offer immigration legal, case management, job development and interpretation services to hundreds of new clients. In Greater Cincinnati, we have built up our infrastructure to resettle twice as many refugees. We also aim to deliver critical case management services to a greater number of unaccompanied migrant children to keep them safe from human trafficking and exploitation.

Thank you again for all you did in 2023 and will do this year to accompany others in their times of need. Together, with God's help, we are making a vital difference for many people in so many ways!

Tony Stieritz
CEO



Mental Wellness Ministry Aims to Create a More Supportive Community



**67 PEOPLE
TRAINED IN
MENTAL HEALTH
FIRST AID**

Mental wellness ministry is not professional therapy or intended to replace mental health counseling services. It serves to supplement such interventions by providing a circle of spiritual support. For many Catholics, their parish is the first place they turn when they're going through major difficulties such as a physical illness, divorce, grief, depression, or addiction.

Going forward, local parishes will be better equipped to meet the needs of

their community thanks to a collaboration between Catholic Charities and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Office for Persons with Disabilities.

Using a grant from the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, the two organizations are piloting mental health wellness ministries at two families of parishes: Our Lady of Grace in Warren County and St. Gregory the Great in Eastern Hamilton County.

"Our goal is to create a culture in the parish where people become more attuned to mental health and mental illness and become a more supportive community to people who might be suffering in some way," says Mary Anne Bressler, Parish & Community Engagement Coordinator for Catholic Charities.

Mental wellness ministry can take different forms depending on a parish's needs and resources. It might include organizing prayer services, promoting events for Suicide Prevention Month, or adding special petitions for mental health concerns.

In most cases, Mary Anne says, parishes are likely to form support groups for people experiencing mental illness or otherwise struggling with mental health, as well as for loved ones of persons experiencing mental health challenges. The groups will give individuals and their loved ones a safe place to be heard and find help.

Once the pilot parishes have set up their ministries and shared their learnings, hopefully more parishes will follow their lead. Mary Anne says caring for our neighbors' mental wellness helps answer the call Jesus gave us in the Corporal Works of Mercy. Jesus Himself visited and healed the sick, with the goal of restoring them to community.

"People like lepers were shunned because they were ill, and that's how many people with mental health issues feel," Mary Anne explains. "Like with 12-step programs and other things, there is a spiritual component to mental health and to finding pathways to healing that are unique to faith-based organizations. For a lot of people, that's a way for them to find meaning and purpose and find comfort in a caring community."

Your generous support of Catholic Charities helps make our community more comforting and caring, one act of compassion at a time.



LEADERSHIP

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With Your Help, She Knows Her Worth and Has Found Her Voice



**396 CLIENTS
SERVED**



**A 71% INCREASE IN
SESSIONS PROVIDED**

Nothing is more gratifying than hearing a Mental Health Services client proudly say, *"I am happy with who I am today."*

Those were Adriana's* words after she successfully completed three years of treatment that empowered her to stand up for her rights, improve her quality of life, and even manage her own business.

Adriana first came to Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio after she was wrongfully terminated from her job. She

was depressed, anxious, and worried about providing for her family.

Working with Bilingual Mental Health Therapist Rosa Reyes-Santana, Adriana engaged in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques that helped her transform her negative thought patterns and beliefs. She also learned to practice better self-care, manage her anxiety, and identify her strengths and skills.

Over time, Adriana has become comfortable speaking up for herself, especially when she feels her rights or the rights of others have been violated. She has put herself on a path to bettering her life and achieving her goals.

In addition to now running her own business, she has enrolled in an English class through Su Casa Hispanic Center and is pursuing her high school equivalency diploma.



"Adriana is a very self-empowered person," Rosa says. "She is more assertive about asking for what she needs and being respected. She has also learned to value the place of mental health in a Latino family and all the good it can provide."

Success stories like Adriana's wouldn't be possible without caring friends like you. Thank you for your generous support of Catholic Charities!

**Name changed for privacy*

Volunteer Spotlight: Paul Fitzgerald, Food For All



**825
VOLUNTEERS**

Food for All, a program of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, tackles hunger in rural and urban food deserts, where access to fresh, healthy food is limited. In 2023, Food for all provided food assistance to over 8,500 people, in Hamilton, Clermont, Brown, Adams, Highland, and Clinton counties. This work would not be able to be done without support of our dedicated volunteers, volunteers like Paul Fitzgerald.

Paul likes to strike up conversations with the neighbors he serves at Food For All pantries. So when a man drove up with fishing rods in the back of his truck, Paul asked him how the fish had been biting that morning.

"He told me he'd gone out to fish so he could have something to eat that day," Paul recalls. "That gets to your heart. I can't imagine that need."

The need to help feed our community is what keeps Paul coming back to Food For All. He's been volunteering since 2016, when the program began. At 79 years of age, he has no plans to stop anytime soon.

Paul learned about Food For All from his parish bulletin at St. Veronica in Eastgate. He was retired with plenty of time to contribute, so he jumped in. Today, he attends every pantry distribution, which sometimes means volunteering two to three times a week.

"It's doing the Lord's work," he says. "I've got the time and the ability, and hopefully I put it to good use."

Prior to the pandemic, Paul, his wife, Barbara, and two other couples were such regular fixtures at every pantry that they became known as "The Posse." Due to health concerns and other circumstances, Paul is the only one still volunteering, but the group remains close friends who get together whenever they can.

Making good friends is an added benefit



of answering God's call to service by volunteering. Paul is actively trying to recruit new people to help, because Food For All currently has fewer people serving more neighbors than ever.

There is no requirement to attend every pantry, and no special skills or experience are needed. Would you consider volunteering your time to serve?

Want to Make a Difference?

Food For All pantries wouldn't be possible without volunteers like Paul. To learn more about volunteer opportunities, visit ccswoh.org/get-involved/volunteer/.

Help our Refugee Families Feel at Home Again



249

REFUGEES
RESETTLED

 A **159%** INCREASE

In 2023, Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Services (RRS) resettled 249 refugees to Cincinnati — a 71 percent increase over last year. This fiscal year, the program expects a 66% increase in new arrivals. RRS needs your help to ensure these families get their new lives off to a promising start.

The influx is the result of a major increase in the presidential determination on refugee admissions nationwide. It's an exciting development, but requires help to find housing.

"For this to be successful in Cincinnati, we're going to need the teamwork and partnership of organizations all throughout the city," says Rachel Burgess, RRS Assistant Director.

"We can't do it alone. We're looking for people willing to enter into our mission with us and help people while they're building a better life for themselves."

RRS is seeking year-long, market-rate leases for safe housing that can accommodate families of between four and 14 people in Butler, Clermont, Hamilton, and Warren counties. Though Catholic Charities does not co-sign the leases, RRS works with the families to obtain steady jobs, access cash assistance, and make a successful transition to life in the United States.

Many of the refugees that RRS recently resettled have come from Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, countries where violent conflict has forced people from their homes. In some cases, newcomers to our community have lived in refugee camps for 10 or more years. Your kindness helps them finally feel at home again.



Want to Help?

In addition to housing, RRS is seeking donations of essentials to properly equip homes for their new residents.

Donated items that should be new:

- Mattresses
- Sheets
- Towels
- Brooms and dustpans
- Laundry baskets
- Trash cans

Donated items that can be gently used:

- Bed frames (*not mattresses*)
- Blankets/comforters (*freshly laundered, please*)
- Pots and pans (*especially large for large families*)
- Can openers

If ordering items online, they can be shipped to Catholic Charities/Refugee Resettlement, 7162 Reading Road, Ste. 600, Cincinnati, OH 45237. Checks can also be sent to that address.

Online donations can be made at ccswoh.org/donate.

Caring for the Caregivers



**90% OF PARTICIPANTS REPORTED
REDUCED STRESS IN CAREGIVING**

It's a painful statistic to consider, but the fact is: *60 percent of caregivers die before the loved one they're caring for.*

That's why Catholic Charities' Caregiver Assistance Network (CAN) has obtained funding from the Council on Aging to add individual coaching and case management services for caregivers in Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton, and Warren counties.

"We're trying to make a dent in that statistic," says Angie Homoelle, CAN Coordinator. "There's so much need right now for people who are caregiving to get support."

The new services are expected to reach an additional 90 people each year as a supplement to CAN's support groups. Sue McLaughlin, a certified life coach, has joined the CAN team to provide the consultations.

Sue will focus on encouraging caregivers to find opportunities for self-care. Even small actions, like having coffee with a friend or going for a walk, can make a huge difference for someone consumed by the all-encompassing work of caregiving.

The one-on-one sessions provide caregivers with a time that is all about them and their needs. Sue's goal is to take them out of the caregiver mindset for a moment so they're not in solution mode for anyone but themselves.

"Coaching is a lot of listening on my end and encouraging caregivers to find where they have their power," Sue says. "They don't have control, but where do they have the opportunity to do something for themselves? They're going to have obstacles, so we identify them and brainstorm how to get around them. We'll also look for resources where maybe I do a little leg work for them, since they're already overwhelmed."

To help as many caregivers as possible, CAN is also creating a peer mentorship program in which past caregivers check in with current caregivers to see how they're doing and hold them accountable for prioritizing self-care.

Wait lists for counseling and therapy are longer than ever. With public and private support, CAN is finding innovative



Sue McLaughlin, CAN Support Specialist

new ways to care for our community's caregivers.

Let Us Help Take Care of You

To participate in CAN's programs, including the new individual coaching sessions, please call our Care Line at **513-869-4483** or email **CAN@ccswoh.org**. Sessions can be conducted in person, over the phone, or virtually to best meet your needs.



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Adopt-A-Family Event Captures the Christmas Spirit

Because of caring community members like you, more than 100 families got to experience the true spirit of Christmas at Su Casa Hispanic Center's Adopt-A-Family event on December 9. Su Casa is a program of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, and it has been holding the event since 2008.

Families were welcomed to Hartwell Elementary School for the annual event that included games, face painting, balloon animals, food, Christmas gifts, and a performance by the beloved Anna and Elsa from Frozen.

Even parents were eager to get their pictures taken with the heroines of the Disney movie! But the highlight of the day was seeing the smiles on the faces of so many children who otherwise might not have had a Christmas to celebrate. "They were so excited! They were playing, they were excited for the opportunity to later open their gifts," says Giovanna Alvarez, Su Casa Hispanic Center Director.

"Sponsors were able to give the gift of hope. Sometimes these families have a lot of challenges, but you can restore a little bit of hope in their future."

The Su Casa team begins planning the event in October by inviting families with the greatest needs to submit Christmas wish lists. Most often, the lists are focused on providing for the children. Items

like winter jackets, boots, warm winter clothes, and books are common requests.

Procter & Gamble, altafiber, Sims-Lohman, and Fifth Third Bank sponsored the 2023 event, providing everything from wrapped gifts to food to volunteer hours and more. This year, in addition to Su Casa staff and corporate volunteers, members of the Catholic Charities Board of Directors also gave of their time to make Adopt-A-Family a beautiful day for everyone who attended.

"We want the event to be very relationship-based, not transactional," Giovanna explains. "We want our guests to know that people in the community truly care about their needs."

One family in attendance stands out in Giovanna's mind. They had just arrived in Cincinnati after six long months of migration from Central America. They are still getting settled here, but thanks to the kindness of donors and supporters, two exhausted, loving parents got to see their four brave little girls receive Christmas presents.

"I want to say 'thank you' to the Cincinnati community for its solidarity with the immigrant community," Giovanna says. "Immigrants go through a lot, and there can be a lack of knowledge about their experiences. I'm very grateful to the community members who are welcoming and empathetic



to the needs of others, especially at an occasion like Christmas. It's important to be a society that lives in solidarity with those in need."

Su Casa is the leading provider of emergency assistance, case management, home study/post-release services (HSPRS), educational services, and health promotion services to the most vulnerable Hispanic/Latino immigrants within the Greater Cincinnati region. 2,834 emergency assistance services were provided and 139 unaccompanied children were served in 2023.



2,834
EMERGENCY
ASSISTANCE
SERVICES
PROVIDED



139
UNACCOMPANIED
CHILDREN SERVED,



A **93% INCREASE**



Interested in Volunteering with Su Casa?

Events like Adopt-A-Family wouldn't be possible without volunteers like you. To learn more about volunteer opportunities, visit ccswoh.org/get-involved/volunteer/.

With Help from Catholic Charities, This Family Is on the Path to a Better Life



595 GUIDED THROUGH THE
IMMIGRATION LEGAL PROCESS

Carolina* has taken extraordinary steps to protect her family. Now, with your help, her family is taking their next steps toward a more promising future here in Greater Cincinnati.

In 2018, Carolina packed up her daughter Blanca* and fled their home country of Guatemala. Carolina had survived abuse at the hands of her partner. When she found out he'd abused Blanca, too, she reported him to the police and testified against him in court. The man was convicted and sentenced to prison — an incredibly rare outcome for domestic abuse cases in Guatemala.

But Carolina and her family still weren't safe. Her former partner threatened her from prison. And because she was living on his family's land, they turned off her electricity and water and forced her out with nowhere to go.

Thanks to generous supporters like you, Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal

Services (ILS) was here to help Carolina when she arrived with Blanca. In July, Carolina won her asylum case. Now, ILS is helping her and her children obtain their green cards.

Carolina's case was made especially tricky by a language barrier. An Indigenous woman, Carolina speaks Aguateco as her first language and Spanish as her second. She is not yet able to read. Interpreters were needed to do three-way translations among English, Spanish, and Aguateco.

"I've watched Carolina be very strong for her family," ILS Director Elizabeth Clapp says. "But she also is so vulnerable and so challenged in navigating everyday life as an Indigenous woman here. She's never been educated. She faces challenges at every turn, but she's always so grateful and so appreciative. She always has a positive outlook."



In addition to ILS, Carolina is working with Su Casa Hispanic Center. She also has been referred to Mental Health Services for support in processing the extreme trauma she has endured.

Catholic Charities can provide wraparound services for the most vulnerable members of our community only because of generous neighbors like you. Thank you for your support!

*Name changed for privacy

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TO DONATE**



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

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Serving Local Families. Empowering Local Lives.



Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio serves and empowers people through God's love in their times of vulnerability. We do so through a full range of local services that engage the community in building solidarity.

Serving more than 19,000 per year, we provide food assistance, senior and caregiver support, mental health counseling, family and parenting education, comprehensive services for migrant and refugee families, and much more.

Our mission is enabled by all those who generously pray, learn, volunteer and donate.



Interested in volunteering or having us pray for you? Visit ccswoh.org!