For a quarter-century, Su Casa Hispanic Center has ministered to a community that continues to grow in Greater Cincinnati.

Su Casa celebrated its 25th anniversary at its annual awards dinner on Sept. 16 at TQL Stadium. In addition to honoring community leaders and organizations that advocate for and serve Hispanic/Latino immigrants, the event highlighted Su Casa’s evolution from a small program offering primarily social and education services into one of the area’s largest providers of human services to the Hispanic/Latino community and other vulnerable international communities.

With over 425 tickets purchased, this year’s event SOLD OUT. Between sponsorship, ticket sales, the silent auction, and the live appeal, the event raised nearly $95,000 for Su Casa’s client programs and services.

Today, 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 Trafficking Victims Assistance Program, the Adopt-A-Family Christmas program and more. Su Casa’s family reunification program is the only one of its kind within 200 miles of Cincinnati.

“Over the years, we’ve become more specialized and have been able to impact a larger number of individuals and families,” says Giovanna Alvarez, Su Casa Director. “As the community continues to grow, it benefits the local labor market. We need to invest in this community.”

The region’s Hispanic/Latino population has reached 4% and continues to increase. Traditionally, immigrants have come primarily from Mexico and Guatemala. Now, Cincinnati is welcoming more newcomers from Colombia, Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela, in addition to the traditional places of origin.

A changing community means changing needs. Giovanna says Su Casa will keep evolving and growing to meet those needs for the next 25 years and beyond.

“For a community to be successful, everybody has to take care of each other so we can move forward together,” she says. “We all benefit from the well-being of this particular community.”
Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio is 106 years old this year. While the organization has grown in its best practices and professionalism over such history, it has always been an innovative service provider. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Catholic Charities makes it a point to respond to people in their times of vulnerability with effective services that no one else offers. Reading the signs of the times, the agency is persistently finding new ways to help those in need to accompany them from crisis to stability and from vulnerability to self-sufficiency.

Having just completed our 5-year strategic plan, we are at another moment in this history of having discerned where the Holy Spirit is calling us next. Through multiple focus groups comprised of a wide range of supporters, community partners, clients, staff and volunteers, we heard loud and clear that the community likes what Catholic Charities does. In fact, they want to see more of it. And, they are eager to see how we might address other service gaps in the community.

In response, we are committing to expanding our service impact over the next 5 years, impacting the lives of at least a thousand more clients a year. This can mean expanding additional mental health services, senior and caregiver support, empowerment for refugees and migrants, family education, and more. However we grow, we aim to increase our capacity to: 1) reduce the waitlists among our most popular and overwhelmed services; 2) broaden the reach of our best-in-class programs to more populations and geographic areas in our 11-county area; and 3) explore new innovative models of empowerment, so that more clients can be the agents of their own, brighter futures. As has dependably been the case for Catholic Charities over the last century, our growth is to be ambitious but sustainable.

Catholic Charities is also growing in how the community engages with us. Through more intentional prayer, greater volunteerism and broader financial support, we are creating a space where people’s faith comes alive. This is YOUR Catholic Charities. It’s thanks to your passion to put God’s love into action through your acts of service, that more clients can access tools, increase their impact in support of a cause that matters to all of them. When a group agrees to pool their resources, they can achieve more than each person could do individually.

The Hispanic/Latino community is characterized by its resilience. But even the strongest person needs access to proper mental health care to work through difficult experiences.

Many of Su Casa’s clients suffered trauma in their countries of origin or in the process of immigrating to the United States. “If you hear their stories... it’s very difficult,” says Sara Obando, Su Casa Health Promotions Supervisor. “They suffer a lot of violence and injustice, and they have a lot of problems. And when they come here, they don’t have a support system. They feel segregated and isolated.”

Su Casa Hispanic Center was selected as the regional recipient of a grant from The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services and The Ohio Latino Affairs Commission, which supports the innovative response. Unfortunately, there are not enough Bilingual Mental Health Providers in the region, and for the uninsured the waiting time to access services can take up to a year! This need was the inspiration behind a new series of wellness workshops so clients can access tools, increase their resilience, and create a support network of community members who speak the same language and share the same culture.

“Right now, mental health services are hard to access,” says Mental Health Services Director Laura Hershberger, one of the presenters in the series, “so we’re looking for other ways to support people.” Fifteen to 20 people, primarily women, attended each week. Class topics included using mindfulness and relaxation to manage anxiety and depression, promoting wellness through positive affirmations, the connection of mind, body and spirit; and overall wellness, including healthy sleep, eating, and exercise habits.

The unique program was well received by the participants. Their appreciation for it and the ongoing need for more mental health options in the community reinforce Catholic Charities’ commitment to offering more such services.

Su Casa Wellness Workshops Give Clients the Tools to Thrive

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Mary Sarah’s Story: The Gift of Service

Mary Sarah Kirley loves to help. Living with developmental disabilities doesn’t keep her from using her many gifts to serve the Lord and her community. She assists with the Children’s Liturgy of the Word at her parish, Bellarmine Chapel. She maintains local walking trails through her involvement with Marjorie Book Continuing Education, and she cares for animals at Brighter Day Farm.

Mary Sarah and her family also participate each year in the Hunger Walk to raise money for the Freestore Foodbank and member pantry programs. She creates a team of friends and loved ones to support her efforts.

This spring, Mary Sarah chose to direct their donations to Catholic Charities’ Food For All program. Together, Mary Sarah’s team of 43 donors raised $3,136!

"Mary Sarah’s heart for service, creativity and empowering others to share their gifts reflects the values and works of mercy that all of us share through Catholic Charities," says Daniel Sarell, Director of Mission Advancement. "We are so incredibly grateful to her."

To show her gratitude to her team members, Mary Sarah sent a handwritten note to each person who supported her cause. "Since she is a non-reader/writer, her donors know this is a big deal," says her dad, Dennis. "Mary tells her mom what to write to each person. Her mom writes it out, and Mary copies it letter by letter."

Mary Sarah is a perfect example of how one person can make a big impact by encouraging others to join them in doing something good for the world.

Get Involved!

Are you feeling inspired by Mary Sarah? Visit ccswoh.org to discover creative ways you can serve your community by praying, learning, volunteering and donating. Form a team! Giving Circles make giving fun and maximizes your impact.

Food for All’s Community Impact

Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio’s Food for All program distributes healthy food at mobile food pantries, located in Clermont, Clinton, Highland, Brown, Adams and Hamilton counties, through a partnership with the Freestore Foodbank and a great deal of volunteer support. In a number of Catholic and public schools throughout the area, Food for All also provides hundreds of students from low-income households with packs of food, known as Power Packs, to ensure they have something to eat on weekends.

"I’m nearly 71 and I swallowed a lot of pride yesterday and took advantage of the Food for All Mobile Pantry service for the first time in Wilmington, Ohio. On my small, fixed income I've been struggling for months. With the rampant inflation we’re all suffering it’s only been getting worse. With this service you provided, I won’t be worried about food. Thank you very much!" – Food for All Customer

JOIN US!

Creative Connections takes place from 10:30 a.m. – noon Mondays at St. Clare Convent or from 10:30-3 p.m. Wednesdays at Knox Presbyterian Church in Hyde Park. To sign up, please contact Angie Homassie at ahomassie@ccswoh.org or (513) 672-3834.

We Are Not Alone, Thanks to Creative Connections

Creative Connections, which takes place once a week in 10-week sessions, offers a support group for caregivers while their loved ones participate in music, movement and other uplifting activities.

“I began to understand the human aspect of this disease and how to cope with it as a caregiver for my wife,” Nick says. “I began to get a ‘feeling’ for Alzheimer’s there because the other caregivers openly shared their experiences, the problems they faced and how they coped.”

In their group, caregivers like Nick talk about a wide variety of issues, from medication questions to bathing concerns. The participants know they are in a safe place where they will find understanding instead of judgment. “When friends pull away and relatives never inquire about your wife’s condition, empathy from other caregivers warms you and gets you through the week,” Nick says.

For Jo Ann, the program reconnects her to music she’s loved for decades and brings a smile to her face. Nick has loved that smile since he met Jo Ann in high school. In August, the couple celebrated their 57th wedding anniversary.

This program is made possible through our partnerships with the Council on Aging and the Giving Voice Foundation as well as by supporters like you!
Veterans Group Helps Welcome Refugees to Their New Homes

As dramatic scenes from Afghanistan flooded our screens in August 2021, veterans were among the first to reach out to Catholic Charities to offer their help in resettling refugees. That led to a collaboration with Team Rubicon, an international nonprofit organization headed by veterans. Using skills they honed in the military, Team Rubicon specializes in mobilizing aid after natural disasters and in other emergencies. Earlier this year, the group partnered with Catholic Charities to offer their help in resettling refugees.

A graduate of Roger Bacon High School, Joey is a Navy veteran who was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. He served his country honorably, now, he’s proud to serve his community. Joey has seen firsthand the challenges many people — especially girls — face in other countries. So, he was especially excited to be part of Refugee Resettlement Services’ mission.

To see anybody, look them in the eye and say, “It’s going to be OK” — it’s been a relief,” Joey says. “Hopefully they can start a good, happy, successful life here.” Catholic Charities is exceptionally grateful to Joey, Team Rubicon and supporters like you for opening your hearts to the resilient refugees who enrich and bless our community!

Lend a Helping Hand

Catholic Charities welcomes volunteers to help set up housing for refugees, welcome families when they arrive, teach classes, mentor youth and young adults, pick up donations, and drive families to and from medical and other appointments. Explore the opportunities at ccswoh.volunteerhub.com.

Children and teens who come to the United States as refugees have to grow up fast. They must adjust to a totally different culture, make new friends and start a new school. Many have endured trauma in their home countries. When they arrive here, young people often bear the responsibility for using their limited English to help their parents — who might not know the language at all — navigate a whole new world.

That’s why Ellen Owens, a volunteer with Catholic Charities’ Refugee Resettlement Services, wanted to give the program’s youth mentees a chance to enjoy a day of just being kids.

Ellen applied for a grant through Bellarmine Chapel to fund a trip for 11 mentees to the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden this summer. The grant paid for the mentees’ admission, as well as lunch and snacks for the teens, many of whom have resettled here from countries in Africa. “They loved it!” Ellen says. “A few of them had seen animals in their natural environment and educated me on some of them. It was really good, because they got to practice their English. It was a social event. It built teams for the mentees and the mentors. They had a ball.”

The mentees, ages 15-18, attend Aiken High School. They meet with their mentors once a week at the school and discuss issues like goal-setting and planning for the future.

Many of the mentees have big responsibilities at home, Ellen says. But they were able to put those things aside at the zoo and just relax. They were excited to translate a sign written in Swahili in the gorilla exhibit — and they might have been even more excited to see Cincinnati’s top celebrity, Fiona the hippo. “They were so appreciative of everything,” Ellen says.

Blessings Fall 2022 | 7

SERVING & EMPOWERING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Are you looking to change lives? Are you interested in making an impact locally? Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio offers opportunities for individuals to volunteer and to make an immediate impact on the lives of those in need. We are currently looking for Spanish/English bilingual front desk representatives, furniture movers and individuals with vehicles capable of helping us with housing. These are just a few of the current needs. By working with Catholic Charities, individuals can use their gifts to live out the Gospel in serving the poor, protecting the vulnerable and welcoming the stranger.

To learn more or to apply today, visit ccswoh.org/get-involved/volunteer.
Serving Hamilton, Butler, Clermont, Warren, Brown, Adams, Highland, Clinton, Champaign, Logan & Clark Counties

Mid-Pointe Tower
7162 Reading Road, Suite 600
Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
513-241-7745

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

If you choose not to receive further communications from Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, please contact Spring Duncan at 513-672-3736 or sduncan@ccswoh.org to be removed from our mailing list.

Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio serves and empowers local families in Greater Cincinnati. Through your generous contributions we are able to provide food assistance, senior and caregiver services, mental health counseling, family and parenting education, case management and assistance for immigrant families, legal assistance for individuals seeking naturalization, and much more.

Please prayerfully consider making your annual gift now. Your support is essential in sustaining our works of mercy.

DONATE TODAY at ccswoh.org/donate.