

Blessings



Catholic Charities
Southwestern Ohio
Serve | Enlighten | Empower

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

Protecting the Vulnerable in the Time of COVID-19



When it all began back in March, the task was two-fold:

1. Step up our game to meet new and greater needs; and
2. Innovate our regular, critical services to deliver them in a safe way.

Lost jobs, compromised health, new traumas, greater isolation, more complicated lives. Regardless of how much or how little we each have been impacted by the pandemic, we all can appreciate that many people in our region are facing these types of new challenges.

This issue of *Blessings* reports to you how your Catholic Charities is helping those in need face these challenges head on. You'll notice a lot of numbers. For instance, if you were to add up the value of all the charitable food, rent and utility assistance and mental health counseling delivered in the first five months of the pandemic, it would amount to \$458,271. Yet, such numbers are often clumsy ways to convey the true impact that our staff, volunteers and supporters are having on people's lives. Hence, we hope these articles will give you a sense of the life transforming works of mercy taking place here. These have only been possible due to your prayers and support as well as great partnerships in the community. Together with you, Catholic Charities is one community of solidarity serving local families and changing local lives.

I encourage you to join us for a livestream report to the community on how we have all responded together as a positive force against the pandemic crisis. Champions of Mercy: Partners in Hope will be broadcasted on Catholic Charities website on Tuesday, November 10 at 7pm. This one-hour program will be our opportunity to thank you for your compassionate support as well as to recognize the many partners in the community who have worked closely with us. Join us at ccswoh.org.

May God bless you and keep you well.

Tony Stieritz, CEO, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio



7,861

deliveries of **FOOD, CARE PACKAGES** and **PPE** to families



\$52,928

in **RENT** and **UTILITIES** assistance for families



151

IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES



4,172

hours of **INTERPRETATION SERVICES** including for healthcare workers and patients



1,375
charitable
MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING SESSIONS



341
early childhood
CONSULTATIONS
in pandemic child care centers



Catholic Charities, the Freestore Foodbank, and Xavier University team up with USDA Farmers to Families



The pandemic has disrupted many people's lives. Job losses and other new hardships have led to greater food insecurity in our region. Catholic Charities' Food for All program has responded in full force through a new drive-thru food distribution model for safe, social distancing. Staff and volunteers continue to serve those in need in rural communities in Clermont, Clinton, Highland, Brown and Adams Counties, and they've expanded their reach in our urban areas through a partnership with USDA's Farmers to Families and the Freestore Food Bank.

Although Xavier University was closed for the summer, on July 27 the campus was abuzz. A line of cars snaked across the

school's parking lots and into the street, each waiting their turn to receive helpings of fruits, vegetables and dairy. Over the next three hours, 43 enthusiastic volunteers put up tents, hauled around pallets and boxes, directed traffic and loaded up cars with healthy food – all in the heat of a Cincinnati Summer day. By the time it was over, 1,400 boxes of produce and 960 boxes of dairy had gone home to families in need.

"You can become overwhelmed by the need that is out there," exclaimed April Hoak, Food for All Coordinator. "But you can also be pleasantly overwhelmed by the volunteers who are there in very hot and humid weather to serve those in need.

People want to help one another, and I'm happy to be a part of that. We at Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio have an enormous amount of gratitude for all our volunteers, the Freestore Food Bank, the amazing staff and police department at Xavier University, many local churches and multiple partner agencies. What an example of living in this together!"

From the beginning of the pandemic to the end of August, Catholic Charities' Food for All effort has distributed over 150,000 meals in rural and urban communities.

To learn more about Catholic Charities' Food for All program, visit: ccswoh.org/programs/food-for-all/

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Vacaciones Útiles: Virtual Summer Enrichment Program

Vacaciones Útiles (VU) is a summer enrichment camp for low-income Hispanic/Latino Children. 2020 marks VU's twelfth year in existence, but due to the pandemic, the program needed to be reinvented from the ground up. Thanks to generous financial support from Procter & Gamble, the Scripps Howard Foundation, the SC Ministry Foundation, the Sisters of Charity, as well as other funders, the program went virtual, with a blend of small group instruction and targeted learning programs designed to keep kids engaged academically during these unsettling times.

From June 29 to August 7, VU focused on 55 students entering 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades to help them make up for missed material and instruction due to the pandemic. The campers all received new Chromebooks so they could participate in camp from home two hours per day. Four certified teachers were hired and trained on how to deliver the new program model. Classes were based on similar ability, instead of grouped by grade level. Campers also were segmented into

small groups to allow for individualized and differentiated instruction. Su Casa Education staff provided a two-hour technology orientation in Spanish for all families on how to use the various educational programs pre-loaded onto their computers. These orientations empowered the children and parents with the tools they needed to be successful.

"This program has been a great help for me and my two sons," raved a mother of two of the campers. "It has been a blessing. I saw how they developed a lot throughout the remote learning process. To me the program helped my boys better prepare for the school year where they would have to take their classes virtually. I also noticed that they were able to improve in their math and their computer skills. Thank you so much, I am very grateful to you all."

Karri O'Hara, Education Services Supervisor, at Catholic Charities shared, "It took a coordinated effort to bring this program to life and make it successful this year. I want to thank all of our teachers

and volunteers for making it happen." Karri also noted that 35 of the students from the VU camp are now enrolled in Catholic Charities' fall tutoring program with Xavier University student volunteers to continue their academic enrichment. Opportunities like these have been instrumental in not only closing the gap between Hispanic/Latino children and their peers, but also bridging the technological divide that often leaves low-income children without access to resources necessary to participate in our increasingly virtual world.



Su Casa Delivery of Food, Care Package, PPE Assistance, and Much, Much More



This past May, Maria called Su Casa Hispanic Center in desperation. She was seven months pregnant. She and her husband had been diagnosed with COVID-19. They were both unable to work or even leave their own home, and Maria was calling for help with rent and utilities.

After learning that the couple wasn't able to go out and shop for food, Su Casa caseworker, Miriam Ortega, not only provided her with housing assistance, she registered Maria in Su Casa's food delivery program, providing her with a care package, PPE and cleaning supplies.

A couple of weeks after that first call, Miriam called to check in with the couple. "Maria was very depressed," Miriam recounted. "Her father, whom she had not seen in 20 years, had passed away from COVID-19 in a small town in Mexico. She cried over the phone but said that she needed to be strong for her children and for a healthy pregnancy." Maria quickly ascertained that such a drastic accumulation of events – living with

the coronavirus, foregoing work income and losing her father – demanded, not just a material response, but a professional mental and emotional one as well. Miriam referred Maria to Catholic Charities' mental health counseling where she is now enrolled.

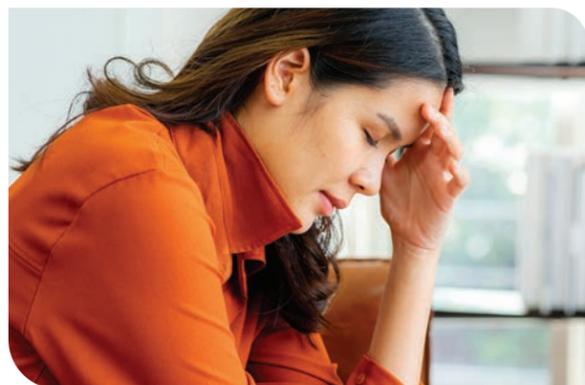
"Thank you, thank you, thank you," Maria came back to tell us. "I'm not sure what my family and I would have or could have done without your assistance. These have been tough times and Su Casa has been here for me and my family."

To learn more about Catholic Charities' Su Casa Hispanic Center program, visit: ccswoh.org/programs/su-casa-hispanic-center-services/



Catholic Charities' Mental Health Program and AccuracyNow Language Services Work Together for More Effective Counseling

Washi has been visiting Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio's Hamilton office for mental health counseling for several years now. She came seeking help for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) that started after the birth of her twins. The severe depression affected her life so much that she was no longer able to care for her twins and her oldest daughter.



Over the past year and a half, Washi has been working with Maggie Waddell, one of Catholic Charities' mental health therapists. Since the pandemic began, their meetings have been taking place via video conference calls.

Originally from China and with trouble speaking English, language was a unique challenge to receiving services. However, a partnership between Catholic Charities' social enterprise, AccuracyNow Language Services, and the Mental Health Services program supplied Maggie with a solution. Jenny Wang, one of AccuracyNow's interpreters, was assigned to all of their counseling sessions. Maggie shared, "Jenny makes the

client feel comfortable, makes both of us feel comfortable. She's been able to build a trust between Washi and me. It feels like there isn't even an interpreter being used. It is such a beautiful thing."

For Washi to manage and cope with her MDD, Catholic Charities has introduced several relaxation techniques as well as motivation goals for her to feel independent. This along with medication management administered through Catholic Charities' psychologist has allowed her to control her MDD. Washi now has a wonderful relationship with her oldest daughter and is taking care of her again. She hopes to also regain care of the twins in the near future.

To learn more about Catholic Charities' Mental Health Services, visit: ccswoh.org/programs/mental-health-services/



Innovating to Provide Support for Caregivers

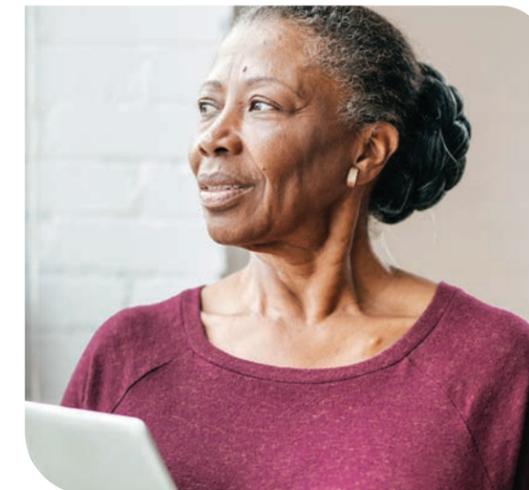
Senior citizens and caregivers of sick and elderly loved ones are among the most vulnerable during the pandemic. And, due to the resulting isolation imposed on our lives, their emotional and spiritual needs and yearning for companionship is greater now more than ever. Catholic Charities' Caregiver Assistance Network (CAN) takes this to heart. It's innovating to make every possible resource available to its participants to maintain these profound social ties.

Thanks to support from the Community Care Corps, CAN has enhanced its virtual groups for caregiver support and respite services that started in response of the COVID-19 pandemic. CAN increased attendance of these groups through better digital accessibility. Chromebooks, projectors, screens, cameras, and wifi-hot spots are being supplied to our support group volunteers. Tutorials on their use are

to follow. Angie Homoele, CAN Coordinator, explained, "This new technology makes the support groups so much more digitally friendly and easy to access. The idea is about getting people whose responsibilities have increased due to the pandemic an easier way to attend the meetings."

Mary Lou Litmer, caregiver of 43 years and longtime support group attendee, recently reached out to Catholic Charities and shared the following regarding the online groups during pandemic: "Not only did the online meetings fulfill my need for a meeting, but I could easily participate with people I didn't know. I know I am not alone and maybe sharing my experience helps others."

To learn more about Catholic Charities' Caregiver Assistance



Network and the services it provides, visit: ccswoh.org/programs/caregiver-assistance-network/



Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations Continue During Pandemic

Responding to a referral from the Early Childhood Intervention Program of Butler County, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio's Early Childhood Mental Health Services (ECMH) Consultant, Maribel Gonzalez conducted a video conference call visit with Julia and her 2-year-old son, Juan. The young boy had exhibited difficult behaviors consistent with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Certain things would often trigger him to unleash tantrums and aggressive behaviors. What made everything even more challenging for Julia was that Juan could be the second child in her family diagnosed with it.

Yet, there was hope. Maribel and Julia discussed the family dynamics and best practices for managing Juan and his brother's challenging conduct. Julia learned about the importance of establishing daily routine, transitioning strategies to help both of her children prepare for the next activity,

and setting up consistent household rules. She agreed to implement Maribel's best practices right away.

A little while later, Maribel heard back from Julia. "Thank you for your help," the mother told her. "I'm no longer having the concerns that I had before with my sons. All of the strategies you shared with me were helpful and easy to implement with my children. I'm able to do 'typical' things like going grocery shopping without the children having meltdowns or running away."

Julia now has a new tool chest of strategies to improve life in her home, and she knows how to put them to work. Despite the challenges on service delivery imposed

by the pandemic, the Catholic Charities ECMH team celebrates that they've found ways to continue their life-giving work of strengthening local families.

To learn more about Catholic Charities' ECMH program, visit: ccswoh.org/programs/family-parenting-services/



Carmen's Journey to Asylum

Coronavirus outbreaks have sadly been a threat to congregate settings. Jails and detention facilities have been no exception. This is why Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services (ILS) team has directed its attention to detained immigrants with asylum claims. Although the cases are very time intensive and difficult to win, a legal path to residency is more than a chance at a new life for someone right now. Release from a detention facility can mean a healthier outcome.

This is why there was a special cause for celebration when Zac Sanders, Director of Immigration Legal Services, recently won asylum for his client Carmen. Originally from Mexico, her family, like many others, has faced tough times during the pandemic. Family members had less work for income, and her son, José, began school from home. But, her life seriously took a turn when she was taken to the county jail and

held on immigration charges. Carmen reached out to Su Casa Hispanic Center for assistance and was introduced to Zac and the Immigration Legal Services' team. Zac took on Carmen's case, and, after getting to know her during his visits to the jail, he spoke highly of his client's character: "Carmen is a strong and caring woman. She is taking care of other women making sure they are ok in detention here." After months of work by the ILS team, an immigration judge granted Carmen asylum.

"I personally want to thank Zac and his team for all the hard work they did for me and my family," Carmen elatedly

shared. "I do not know where I would be today without the help I received."

To learn more about Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services, visit: ccswoh.org/programs/immigration-legal-services/



Refugee Resettlement Services Youth Mentoring Program

Students across the country have had to navigate the disorienting reality of going to school in the midst of the pandemic. Imagine how even more challenging this can be for young, high school and college-aged refugees recently resettled here. These are the people whom Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Services' Youth Mentoring Program is determined to help.

A brand new program as of late last year, the Refugee Youth Mentoring (RYM) program's goals are to advance the civic and social engagement of refugee youth and support their individual academic and vocational achievement. RYM currently pairs up mentors with refugees at Withrow and Aiken High Schools as well as through one-on-one relationships with 18 to 24 year-olds.

The mentoring program started off the year as a tremendous success with strong attendance and dedicated mentor volunteers. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. RYM Coordinator Donald Foley wasn't going to let that hold the program back. At first, what began as in-person meetings transitioned to phone calls. "It was great to have a new friend at the start of the year to help me with my English," recalled Demerci, a high school student at Withrow. "I was happy they were still there to speak with me by phone after pandemic began,"

Then video interactions were introduced. Angie Smith, started volunteering for Catholic Charities four years ago in job placement and computer skills classes, then joined the RYM program earlier this year.

When the pandemic began, she and her mentee, Nyota, began meeting via Zoom. Angie shared, "She was stuck in her home speaking French or Swahili and there was no opportunity for her to practice her English. Our Zoom calls made that happen. Now that she has gone back to school we are still practicing and her English continues to improve."

Then, in late May, Donald began holding group meetings with social distancing in Cincinnati parks while arranging for outside meetings or phone calls for the one-on-one mentorships. Gathering in Mt. Airy Forest, the Withrow High School group, for example, conducted job and college searches, reviewed job applications, discussed current topics like racial justice, and planned how to help other refugee families. The group even learned the history of Labor Day and wrote letters of thanks to essential workers!

Donald articulates the importance of bringing back the in-person meetings for the high school students in the program:

The Refugee Youth Mentoring Program provides a safe environment for high



school students to interact with their peers, crucial interactions that were limited when schools closed following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The in-person programming allows Catholic Charities staff to effectively monitor and support the youths' social/emotional well-being at a time when schools face major challenges and barriers to supporting students beyond academic supports. The program offers a consistent contact where our clients can go for support with academics as well as issues that arise at home related to the pandemic.

If you are interested in becoming a mentor for refugee youth, contact Donald Foley at dfoley@ccswoh.org.

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Partners in Hope

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