

YOUNG IMMIGRANT ASSERTS

Her Right to Be Here

As an undocumented immigrant, there's a long list of things Darling Cerna can't do.

When she was a teenager, she could only sit on the sidelines as she watched her friends excitedly get their driving permits and first jobs. When it came time for college, she couldn't get state financial aid to help pay tuition. For the past decade, she couldn't leave the country, because without papers, she can't return. She can't vote. Even getting a mortgage and a credit card can be out of reach.

"It can make you feel like you're no one," she said of her undocumented status.

Darling came to the U.S. legally. When she was just 5, she and her parents fled poverty and violence in Guatemala and immigrated here on a 10-year visa. But they overstayed their visa, throwing the family into undocumented status.

So when the Obama administration enacted the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012, Darling didn't hesitate to apply. The policy, renewable every two years, defers deportation for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children and authorizes them to work.

LIKE A FAMILY

Staff at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton's El Centro program, which has served the Latino community in Greater Mercer County since 1999, helped Darling through the process. El Centro also offers English classes, job training, parenting classes, basic needs services, trauma counseling, after-school programs and summer camps for children, and case management to address all of a person's needs. It's authorized by the U.S. Department of Justice to provide legal assistance to help immigrants



achieve citizenship and naturalization. El Centro has been a lifeline for many families through the ongoing pandemic by remaining open and fully operational.

"El Centro has been amazing. They're always incredibly helpful," said Darling, 25, who lives in Trenton. "They become so invested in the people they help that it's almost like a family. They know everyone by name, and you never feel like a burden."

Getting her DACA approval was a relief, she said, because "you have a document that proves you have the right to be here."

Still, DACA offers no path to citizenship or permanent legal residency. The policy also has been under fire in recent years, with anti-immigration lawmakers looking to end protections for the estimated 650,000 to 900,000 undocumented immigrants DACA authorizes to live and work in the country legally. That's something Darling hopes immigration reform will change.



A Message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

It is hard to believe that as I am writing this, we are almost three-quarters of the way through 2020. Yet to some extent, this year so far feels like the longest eight months I've ever experienced. 2020 will certainly be a defining moment to be recorded in the history books. It will be remembered as a time when the world unified to fight a global pandemic, and our communities worked together to do their part – quarantining at home, shifting work and school online as much as possible, and helping our neighbors in need, as many people lost their jobs and struggled to secure basic supplies. This year also proved to be a profound moment for our country, as the brutal killing of George Floyd and others re-opened deep wounds that have for centuries caused so much pain for our Black brothers and sisters and challenged our commitment to ensuring equality for all.

Indeed, this year has tested, and continues to test, our resilience and imagination. We, along with you, were forced to face our fears and pivot to be present for those who

depend on us. At Catholic Charities, inspired by our Catholic faith and shared values, we never lost sight of all the people who rely on us to overcome life's challenges. As we have for over 100 years, we will continue to be there for them, no matter what the years may hold.

It is difficult to predict what the future has in store for us, but whatever comes our way, we are ready to meet the challenge. Through the grace of God, our dynamic and heroic staff, volunteers, Board of Trustees and County Boards, Bishop David M. O'Connell, and all of you, we will overcome and thrive. Your compassion and unwavering support carries us through dark times and gives us hope and the strength to uphold our mission.

Warmly,

Marlene Laó-Collins
Executive Director



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Countdown to our **GUARDIAN ANGEL BENEFIT OF HOPE**

It's almost here! Our inaugural virtual Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope will dazzle your computer and TV screens on Wednesday, September 30th!

The event combines four of our annual fundraisers into a single online event, a move made to ensure the safety of our supporters and staff during the ongoing pandemic.

We've lined up comedian and actor Joe Piscopo to host. The benefit also will include other special guests, musical performances, a silent auction, a 50/50, awards for outstanding volunteers and supporters, viewing parties and much more.

Here's a sneak peek at what you can expect:

- The Howell High School Quarantined Choir will perform.
- We'll have giveaways of \$100 Visa gift cards, Apple AirPods and a Kindle. (Winners must be registered and present at the time of live-streaming to win.)

YOUNG IMMIGRANT ASSERTS

Her Right to Be Here

(CONTINUED FROM COVER)



Darling, who graduated from Muhlenberg College in

Allentown, Pennsylvania,

where she earned an annual merit scholarship to study public health and French. “I only lived there for five years so I don’t remember it very well. But there are a lot of job opportunities there for people who are bilingual. English classes have become a big thing.”

In the meantime, she works in college counseling at Princeton Day School, her alma mater. Besides guiding students toward successful futures, she works hard to ensure they understand the value of voting.

“People my age and younger say: ‘why would I vote?’ or ‘I don’t know who to vote for,’” she said of young voters, who go to the polls less than any age group. “I tell them about the 800,000 of us (DACA immigrants) who can’t vote. I think they’re so lucky to be citizens or legal residents, and they don’t even know it.”

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FOR INFORMATION about El Centro, contact Director Roberto Hernandez at (609) 394-2056 or rhernandez@cctrenton.org.

A LIFE IN LIMBO

Without a path to citizenship, “it’s like you’re stuck, in limbo,” said Darling, who has to reapply for DACA every two years. “The only way to get my citizenship is if I marry someone and stay married at least two years. I can’t ever bring myself to do that, because I never want someone to come to me and say: ‘you’re a citizen because of me, because you married me.’ We DACA students work so hard, and we are the people responsible for what we have. We don’t deserve to be punished and stay in limbo, because we didn’t make the conscious decision to come here. We were brought here.”

As much as she longs for citizenship, she added, “I can be patient because I have my work permit and I am able to do many things. What I fear most is my parents’ status. Most DACA students, if not all, have parents who have been here for years and still cannot attain any form of document legalizing their being here. Despite being taxpayers, having no criminal history or doing anything remotely bad, our parents’ futures are a giant question mark. We DACA recipients are oftentimes the future of our generation. We end up providing for and helping our parents to make sure they have a ‘normal’ retirement later down the line.”

Darling knows, being undocumented, that deportation is a constant threat. She tries to see the bright side.

“The violence is still bad in Guatemala, and poverty has gotten worse, especially with the coronavirus,” said

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know that Catholic Charities is there. Throughout the hardships caused by this pandemic, Catholic Charities remains steadfast in their ministry to the most vulnerable in our society by providing food pantries, shelters, group homes, crisis counseling and more,” said Mary Ann Saville, the benefit’s co-chair along with Caroline Taylor. “That is why now, more than ever before, I believe we must all come together to support Catholic Charities in every way we can.”

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FOR INFORMATION, contact Events Coordinator Barbara Yuson at byuson@cctrenton.org or (609) 394-5181, ext. 1159.

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- Buy a chance for our Super 50/50 raffle. Last year’s raffle payout was over \$10,000!

It’s free to tune in, but advance registration is requested. Register here: <https://www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org/GABOH2020>.

Can’t attend? You can still donate now (see envelope in this newsletter or donate online at www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org) to support Catholic Charities and ensure that people in need in Central Jersey can feed their families, get crisis counseling, recover from addiction, avoid homelessness and more.

“In this difficult and often frightening time of illness, job loss and shuttered businesses, it is comforting to

A Young Father **BUILDS A SAFE HOME**

Bilaal was just a teenager when his life took a downward turn. He joined a gang and found himself in and out of prison and using drugs. For eight years, he struggled.

“I was always into something,” he said.

By his mid-20s, he knew he needed to get back on track, for the sake of his children. He and his longtime girlfriend had three children, but she fell into addiction and the couple separated. Bilaal and the children soon became homeless, living with relatives.

“We were pretty much about to be on the streets,” Bilaal said.

Instead, he reached out to Monmouth County for help, and the county connected him with Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton’s Linkages program in Tinton Falls. Linkages is emergency transitional housing for homeless individuals and families that’s located on the sprawling, verdant grounds of a former motel where beachbound vacationers used to stay. It offers safe, clean and spacious living quarters that feel homey, thanks to suite-style units with full kitchens, a community building with laundry facilities, a playground and plenty of room for children to run, bike and play.

“It’s wonderful, because we finally have our own space,” said Bilaal, who moved to Linkages in April with his children Brielli, 8, Jaden, 6, and Josiah, 1, and his girlfriend’s daughter Skye, 4.

“If we weren’t here, then we would be homeless,” he added.

A GOOD ROLE MODEL

Stacey DePoe, Linkages’ director, applauded Bilaal’s progress.

“To take on two roles and be a single parent takes a strong person,” DePoe said. “What makes it even more amazing is Bilaal is also parenting a child he is not the biological father of. He is determined to be a good role model to these children and give them a place to call home.”

At Linkages, Bilaal especially loves that the family now has their own kitchen, where he can cook whatever the children want. Fried Oreos are one of his specialties.



▲ Bilaal lives at Linkages with his children Brielli, 8, Jaden, 5, Skye, 4, and Josiah, 1.

Linkages proved a lifesaver when the pandemic hit, he said. The family could quarantine safely, as Bilaal focused on finding a job.

Now 26, Bilaal graduated from the Fortis Institute in Lawrenceville last January, with his certification in heating, ventilation and air conditioning. He recently landed a job for a construction company.

“It was hard to find a job,” he said, referring to the pandemic’s crippling impact on the economy and employment. “But I did, and I feel great.”

The family looks forward to finding a home of their own soon.

“I want to paint my room pink,” Brielli said with a smile.

FOR INFORMATION about Linkages, contact Program Director Stacey DePoe at sdepoe@cctrenton.org or (732) 922-0400.

GROUP HOME HELPS RESIDENTS

Transition to Independent Living

Theresa Geslicki likes to clean. Stop by her home in South Jersey, and you'll likely find her with a rag or trash bag in hand, polishing and picking up until everything sparkles.

"She's very helpful. Sometimes we got to stop her, or she will help you from one end of the house to the other end," Rose Denny laughed.

Theresa lives in a behavioral health group home on the grounds of Ancora Psychiatric Hospital. Denny is her house manager there.

The home is one of seven that Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton runs at Ancora for 39 people with serious mental illness transitioning to independent living. The homes are part of a program called Intensive Residential Program-South, and that's part of a network of 17 group homes that Catholic Charities operates throughout Central Jersey. Altogether, they serve close to 90 people.

The homes have differing levels of supervision, as residents work toward independent living. (The group homes at Ancora have 24/7 supervision.) Staff teach residents life skills like cooking, cleaning, scheduling doctor's appointments, grocery shopping, navigating public transit and more and accompany them into the community for recreational outings and errands. Residents attend daily counseling sessions and support groups to learn about their mental illnesses and how to cope with their symptoms. Staff also provides crisis intervention services.

The ongoing pandemic has created some operational challenges, with statewide stay-at-home orders prompting staff to get creative to meet residents' needs. Counseling and support groups moved online, while outings became football tosses and sidewalk strolls on Ancora's grounds instead of trips into the community. Staff enlisted residents in their own protection, helping them make face masks and adopting more rigorous cleaning practices. A local school also enlisted group home residents to create greeting cards that teachers gave to students as a sendoff to summer.

CREATIVITY A COPING STRATEGY

Such creative initiatives are something Theresa got fully behind. She loves drawing, painting ceramics and anything artsy. She also enjoys crossword puzzles and arithmetic.



▲ Theresa Geslicki, outside the group home at Ancora Psychiatric Hospital where she lives.

"I'm doing whatever I can to get well," said Theresa, 64, who has lived at a group home since 2008, after spending some time at Ancora Psychiatric Hospital. "I corrected my bad behaviors. I learned to become more reliable."

Program Director Heather Alexander has known Theresa for 12 years and seen her "blossom" over that time.

"She's incredibly creative and loves to share that with other people, and she uses her creativity to help her cope with the symptoms of her mental illness," said Alexander, a licensed professional counselor. "She's a beautiful, bright human being."

Theresa loves animals and keeps a few fish as pets. Before the pandemic, she visited a local animal shelter weekly to help care for the dogs. That's her dream job. She hopes she'll be able to live on her own again some day - with lots of pets.

"I came a long way," Theresa said.

With a smile, Denny nodded and told her: "I'm so proud of you."

FOR INFORMATION about the Intensive Residential Program-South, contact Director Heather Alexander at (609) 561-7670 or halexander@cctrenton.org.

Donor-Advised Funds

A BETTER WAY TO GIVE

There are all sorts of ways to support a charity, from donating cash or in-kind items to volunteering to legacy giving. But one of the most popular in recent years is a charitable strategy you may have never heard of - donor-advised funds.

Givers contributed \$37.12 billion to donor-advised funds in 2018 alone, a 20 percent jump over the prior year, according to the National Philanthropic Trust.

WHAT IS A DONOR-ADVISED FUND?

Simply put, it's like a personal charitable savings account. People can deposit cash, stock, real estate, artwork or other assets into a donor-advised fund and either pick how to invest it or have an investment adviser manage it. In return, they get an immediate tax deduction - but can wait until they're ready, even if that's years, to decide where to disburse the funds. The fund essentially becomes like a waiting room for charitable donations. Donors can contribute to the fund as often as they want, with the assets growing over time. Most funds require a minimum \$250 to \$500 per donation.

Donor-advised funds date back to the Great Depression, but they didn't become popular until the early 1990s.

SIMPLIFYING CHARITABLE GIVING

Paul J. and Margo Hooker of Sea Girt support many charities (including Catholic Charities) through a donor-advised fund managed by Vanguard Charitable, one of the largest donor-advised fund programs in the U.S. The couple are longtime Catholic Charities supporters honored in 2018 with our Richard J. Hughes, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton Humanitarian Award.

"I admire what Catholic Charities does and gets done," Paul said. "Catholic Charities provides tremendous relief every year to people in need, regardless of their faith. That's why we support them every year."

Paul said he loves how donor-advised funds streamline the philanthropic process.



▲ Paul J. and Margo Hooker received the 2018 Richard J. Hughes, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton Humanitarian Award.

Instead of writing checks, hunting for addresses to mail them, and chasing down acknowledgment letters for tax accounting, the Hookers now do most of their annual philanthropy online through their Vanguard fund. The fund sends the donation directly to the non-profit with a letter saying who made it. The couple can support as many charities as they want in one sitting with just a few clicks on their computer.

"I just can't tell you how easy it is," Paul said. "Your money grows there, you get an instant tax deduction, and you can do any end-of-the-year cleanup (to maximize charitable write-offs) there as needed. I recommend the Vanguard donor-advised fund to anyone who wants to make charitable giving much simpler."

FOR INFORMATION about donor-advised funds, contact your investment adviser.



Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope

A Special Thank You to Our Sponsors

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Judith M. and
the late Honorable Anthony J.
Persichilli

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"I give and bequeath to *Catholic Charities, Diocese of
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the sum of \$ _____; or _____ percent
of my estate; or the property described herein to establish/
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The principal is to be endowed and the distributions,
as established by the Catholic Charities, Diocese
of Trenton Board of Trustees, shall be used for
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TO DISCUSS leaving a
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Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope

In the comfort of your own home
Wednesday, September 30, 2020
6 to 7:30 PM

For details, event sponsorship or to
donate to the auction, please contact
Barbara Yuson, Events Coordinator,
at byuson@cctrenton.org or
(609) 394-5181, ext. 1159.

Comedian and actor Joe Piscopo will host Catholic Charities' inaugural Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope. We are honored to have him join us at this unprecedented virtual event on September 30th, 6-7:30 pm. Don't miss it!

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton's 2020 virtual fundraiser will also feature a silent auction, super 50/50, entertainment and more!

2020 HONOREES

RICHARD J. HUGHES HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Thomas J. and Dr. Judithann C. Keefe

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Judith M. and
the late Honorable Anthony J.
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