

SUMMER 2021

CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org



A Pause and... You Move Forward

Living with Mental Illness

Tricia Risley, Program for Assertive
Community Treatment client
(see full story on page 3)



from the **BISHOP OF TRENTON**

Dear Friends and Supporters of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton:

The past year and a half have been a source of crisis, anxiety, and fear for the whole world, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As has been the case so often before here in the Diocese of Trenton, when our needs were the greatest, Catholic Charities responded with characteristic generosity and commitment. As Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, I am so grateful to the board, administration, staff, volunteers, and benefactors who make the presence of Christ and the service of Catholic Charities so keenly felt among those most in need, not only in times of crisis but throughout the year – this year, every year!

These pages bear dynamic witness to the good work of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton. I hope you enjoy reading the spring newsletter and annual report

as a reflection of what YOU make possible. You will become acquainted with people to whose lives Catholic Charities and YOU have made an amazing contribution.

I want to encourage all those who turn to Catholic Charities in need: do not lose heart. I want to thank those who are always so generous to Catholic Charities: give your heart. I want to support those who labor on behalf of Catholic Charities: remain its heart. May the grace of God keep our hearts beating together as one.

The words of Saint Augustine ring so true: “Charity is the root of all good works.” My dear friends, every act of charity is a stepping stone to heaven. May God bless you.

Gratefully in the Lord,

Most Reverend David M. O’Connell, C.M., J.C.D.



from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, and polarizing politics of the past year and a half have tested our faith. Without warning, life changed dramatically. We could not visit our

loved ones to grieve or celebrate life’s big and small moments together, at a time when we needed each other the most. Domestic violence, food insecurity, mental health challenges, and job losses increased. We easily could have been paralyzed by fear. But as people of faith, we did not allow fear to have the last word.

We learned to adapt and interact in a different way, using technology like Zoom and organizing drive-by celebrations. Our supporters sprang into action to help their vulnerable neighbors through our services. Foundations and corporations reached out to support

our work, knowing we help those most in need. Our employees rose up to meet their own challenges like children schooling from home. Throughout, we remained dedicated to our commitment as essential employees. Faith, hope, and charity united us for the greater good.

As the summer approaches and we look forward to normalcy returning, let us not forget that recovery takes time. Our community will continue to need help, and we remain deeply grateful that you are here to join us in our mission.

God bless you, and stay well.

**Marlene Laó-Collins
Executive Director**

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Thanks to our donors. Your support makes these success stories possible.

A PAUSE AND... YOU MOVE FORWARD

Living with Mental Illness



Tricia Risley stands with Benjamin Watson, a Burlington PACT mental health advocate, outside her home. ▶

With pandemic restrictions easing as summer approaches, people from Princeton to Palmyra are planning road trips, parties, and more. Tricia Risley is brushing up on motherhood.

Tricia lost custody of her daughter eight years ago because of her mental illness. But now, the 15-year-old is coming to live with her for the summer - and maybe for good. Tricia is nervous. She doesn't have as much money as her daughter's father, and she lives a quiet life. Will her daughter be bored?

"I forget how to be a mom!" she said. "I hope I don't make too many mistakes."

Benjamin Watson is quick with words of reassurance: "You'll make some, because parents do. The key is to learn from them."

Watson works for Catholic Charities' Program for Assertive Community Treatment, where Tricia has been a client since 2014. The program, known as PACT, serves people with serious, persistent mental illness who have a history of hospitalization and risk returning

to institutional settings. The goal of treatment, which includes psychiatric medical intervention, counseling, vocational training, recreational outings and transportation, is to help people live successfully in the community. Catholic Charities has four PACT teams - three in Mercer County and one in Burlington County. As a PACT mental health advocate, Watson and other PACT team members make regular house calls to counsel and assist clients however they need.

Diagnosed at 15, Tricia lives with multiple mental disorders including severe recurring depression, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, self-harming, and bulimia. She spent so much time in psychiatric hospitals from such a young age that they "felt like home to me."

But with PACT's help, Tricia has been hospital-free for over two years. Catholic Charities will honor her this fall with a Client Achievement Award at its Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope.

"Trish has made incredible progress in her mental health

journey," Watson said. "The word I would use to describe her success lately is 'resilience.' Trish has been through some major life challenges yet has remained stable and aware that she can get through these circumstances with her own coping skills and the support of her friends, family, and mental health team. She recognizes that hard times will come and go, but she can find ways to manage them and come out stronger and wiser. We are happy to see her having a much better quality of life these last months and years, and it's due to her hard work and willingness to change and grow."

Tricia grows bashful in the face of such praise. She knows well that there's no cure for mental illness. Instead, you learn to cope with it, and "that takes work, it takes practice, it's finding out what works for you," she said. She knows many people walk her same path and work equally hard to overcome life's challenges. But she doesn't discount her own efforts.

"I am proud," she said. "I do think I came a long way."

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

3,564

People served through our counseling/mental health-focused programs

541

Individuals received addiction-focused treatment

5,117

Hours of pre- and post-employment-related services provided

359

People served through housing services

444

People received transportation

2,260

People received enhanced medical supports

continued on page 4 ▶

A Pause and... You Move Forward: Living with Mental Illness *(continued)*

YOU WILL BE OKAY AGAIN

Since she has been out of the hospital, Tricia launched a cleaning business. She self-published two books of poetry and is working on a third. She has a longtime boyfriend, and they're considering marriage. She goes to church. She got a car and happily chauffeurs any friends-in-need on errands. She hopes to expand her cleaning business - or maybe move into a career in phlebotomy, which she studied at community college.

And then there's her daughter. She worries about her because mental illness can be inherited. Caring for her daughter gives her another reason to prioritize her own mental health.

"My responsibilities help me a lot," she said. "Knowing that my daughter is counting on me keeps me focused and grounded."

She credits the PACT team with teaching her coping strategies - and bringing a deep compassion to their jobs. "Even though they're my case managers, I feel like I developed a friendship with them," she said. They've also shaped her philosophy about living with mental illness.

"I like the semi-colon as the symbol for mental illness. The semi-colon shows that the story doesn't just end - you take a brief pause and then the story continues. Maybe that brief pause is you sitting in bed for three days and not eating or brushing your hair or your teeth. But then that pause ends, and you move forward. It's okay not to be okay, and when you're done not being okay, you will be okay again," she said.

"I've had some pretty bad days and weeks," she added. "But I also know what it's like to be happy, so I know these days will pass and I will get happy again."

FOR INFORMATION about the Program for Assertive Community Treatment, contact Program Director Crystal Smith at (609) 396-9777, ext. 2216, or csmith@cctrenton.org.

PARTNERING ON VACCINE OUTREACH

This time last year, there seemed no end in sight to the coronavirus pandemic, with a COVID-19 vaccine still months away from development and approval. But what a difference a year makes! More than half of Americans have gotten at least their first dose of the vaccine, and life for many is getting back to "normal," as pandemic restrictions ease up.

In April, Catholic Charities staff joined the ranks of healthcare professionals working to vaccinate

the public and bring an end to the pandemic. Catholic Charities has hosted multiple free vaccine clinics, inoculating hundreds of people, at several program locations in Trenton and Burlington County. More are planned, as the country progresses toward its goal of getting at least 70 percent of the population vaccinated to reach herd immunity.

"Our work has really focused on breaking down barriers to vaccine



▲ Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora, pictured with our Chief Nurse Executive Lisa Merritt and Executive Director Marlene Laó-Collins, visited our Behavioral Health campus in Trenton to see our vaccine outreach.

to Speed up Pandemic's End



▲ Brooke Clegg of Ewing winces as she gets a vaccine at one of several free, walk-in vaccine clinics Catholic Charities hosted in May.

access in the Hispanic and Black communities, which have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19,” Executive Director Marlene Laó-Collins said. “All sorts of things can keep someone from getting a vaccine, including language and transportation barriers. We have bilingual staff. We have vans to come get you. Fear is behind some of the vaccine hesitancy, so we really try to address that too and get across the message that getting a vaccine is much safer than getting COVID-19.”

The vaccine clinics have had another positive effect - they’ve strengthened Catholic Charities’ bonds with its community partners, as providers team up on vaccine outreach, Laó-Collins added. Catholic Charities’ partners in this work have included the City of Trenton, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton, the Trenton Health Team, the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Thomas Edison State University, the Visiting Nurse

Association of Central Jersey, Drexel University’s College of Nursing and Health Professions, and Rapps Pharmacy.

As a provider of essential public health and social services, Catholic Charities stayed open and fully operational throughout the pandemic. The vaccine outreach is one other way that the agency strives to help people, scores of whom have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic, recover, Laó-Collins said.

“We are used to acting with urgency to help people, however they need us,” she said. “We know it may take months - maybe years - for people to recover from this pandemic. We remain focused on our mission, and we will be here to ensure they recover.”

FOR INFORMATION on Catholic Charities’ vaccine outreach, contact Community Health Nurse Educator Lauren DeVries at (609) 819-6690, ldevries@cctrenton.org or visit www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org/covid-19-community-outreach.

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

754

Families received crisis intervention and stabilization services

1,412

Individuals received support, case management, and other services through El Centro

3,844

Children and adults received counseling and support services to help with trauma

534

Individuals were provided with immigration support and counseling services

184

Individuals were provided with English as a Second Language (ESL) classes

HELPING CHILDREN FIND STABILITY after Dangerous Journeys

At first glance, Nathaly seems like any other 16-year-old - shy around strangers, weary in the way over-busy teenagers can be, and ping-ponging steadily to and from her computer screen as the virtual school days at her North Jersey high school demand.

But just a year ago, life was very different. Nathaly lived with her family in Ecuador, where the coronavirus pandemic worsened poverty's longtime stranglehold on the South American country. More than 52 percent of Ecuadorians now live in poverty, by some estimates, with school dropout and child labor rates rising. (In comparison, the U.S. poverty rate is about 12 percent.) Pregnant at 15, Nathaly feared the future.

Without a word to her family, she left home last December, her sights set on a better life in the United States. Twelve years ago, her aunt Betty had made a similar decision. Betty's journey across the border had been perilous, but she'd since built a safe, comfortable life

in North Jersey. Wanting the same for her niece, she bought Nathaly a plane ticket to Mexico - and prayed for God to protect her as she traveled alone by bus and foot the remaining distance to Texas.

The journey through Mexico took seven days. Along the way, Nathaly met two other teen émigrés, and they drew strength from each other as they navigated the harsh desert and carefully avoided strangers in Juárez, a border city with a violent history especially for women. At the Texas border, they found a dry river bed to cross, and the brighter future they'd suffered for at last seemed within their grasp.

Then Border Patrol swarmed. The immigration agents caught all three girls and put them in immigration detention shelters, where a judge would decide their fate. Nathaly, though, felt only relief.

"At least we're going to be alive," thought Nathaly, who was eight months pregnant during her grueling trek.



▲ Betty, Nathaly, Betty's daughter, and Nathaly's baby sit with Marilyn Zeno of Catholic Charities' Safe Passages program.

CHILDREN MORE VULNERABLE

For many immigrants caught after entering the U.S. without documentation, deportation can be an unavoidable fate. But for unaccompanied minors like Nathaly, the future is a bit more

complicated. Federal law mandates protective procedures for them, recognizing the higher risks that they, as vulnerable children, face of exploitation, trafficking, or violence. And a new federal policy

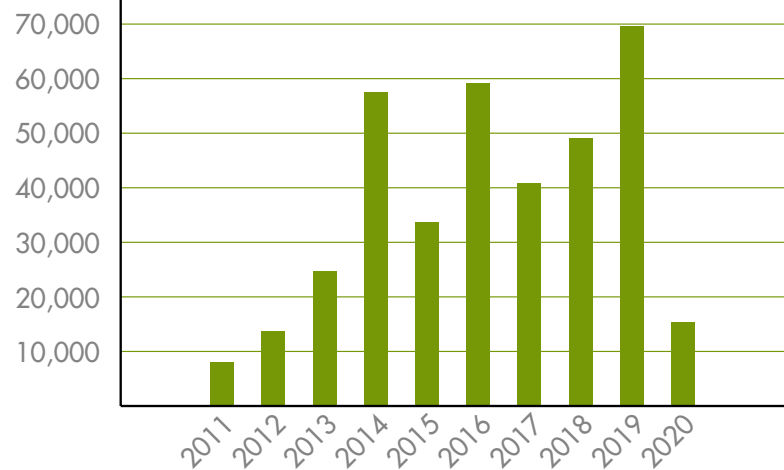
CHILD MIGRATION TRENDS

Children migrate to the U.S. for the same reasons adults do – most often to escape violence, food insecurity and poverty in their home countries. Often, they migrate to join parents or relatives already living here.

enacted in February aims to speed up their release and reunification with their families.

That’s where the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) comes in. The USCCB created a program called Safe Passages that reunites unaccompanied, undocumented minors who have been apprehended by immigration authorities with sponsors in the U.S. (typically family members). In New Jersey, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton steps in after that reunion to provide services statewide that help the children find stability and normalcy as their immigration cases proceed through the legal system. The need is acute: In March alone, Border Patrol apprehended nearly 19,000 unaccompanied children at the border, a record since at least 2009, according to federal figures.

At Catholic Charities, Marilyn Zeno works at the program, which is based at Community Services in Lakewood and has been in place since 2012. Catholic Charities helped about 70 children last year and so far this year in New Jersey through Safe Passages.



Source:
U.S.
Department
of Health
and Human
Services

“We provide them all the resources and referrals they need to move on,” Zeno said. “For example, if you are undocumented, you don’t have insurance. So we help them apply for charity care to cover medical bills. We help them enroll in school. We help them get ID. If mental health is a concern, we connect them with guidance counselors and mental health care. We help them connect with pro bono attorneys to handle their case. We do whatever we can to help them find stability and safety here.”

For Nathaly, that meant transferring her immigration case from Texas to New Jersey, where

she now lives with her aunt. It also meant ensuring she got obstetric and pediatric care for the baby boy she gave birth to in February.

Nathaly wants to stay in the U.S. and become a citizen. She dreams of someday becoming a doctor. But the baby is her overriding purpose now.

“I want to finish my education so I can give my son what I never had in Ecuador,” she said.

FOR INFORMATION on Safe Passages, contact Program Supervisor Daniel Correa at (732) 363-5322 or dcorrea@cctrenton.org.

COMMUNITY
SERVICES

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

43,626

Visits to our food pantries

25,352

Visits for information and referral services

378

Individuals received assistance with food stamps

771

Households received assistance during the holidays

127

Individuals provided with assistance through immigration support services

781

Elderly residents received help with home repairs

430

People assisted in obtaining permanent housing

1,191

Rent/utility assistance payments made

A SUPERHERO GIVES BACK after Life-saving Help

Plenty of people respect their mothers. Karen's kids so revere her that they call her Wonder Woman.

"They buy me t-shirts, mugs - I've got every trinket that's Wonder Woman-themed," she laughed. "It's the most endearing term they could ever use for me. I guess they see me as their hero because I battled the beast and I slayed the dragon and I protected them the whole way through."

The beast and dragon was her ex-husband, who she met as a teenager and married soon after. "My marital relationship was volatile from Day 1," Karen recalled. "The abuse was verbal, emotional, physical, financial. He cheated constantly. The more I uncovered, the more violent and controlling he got. Two children and three houses later, we had our 'ways,' where you could feel that tension building and you knew something was going to happen. I felt suffocated, but I didn't know who to tell, where to turn, what to do. I was so afraid to get the authorities involved, because he

always told me, 'I will kill you. I already know where I'll bury you.'"

Her hesitation ended the day he attacked her during an argument, just after she'd gotten out of the shower. She fled in only her towel and sped to her parents' home nearby.

"I had never told anybody any of this was going on, because for the two of us, it was normal. I never thought whether the neighbors could hear. So when I got to my parents, I was still in my towel, shivering, screaming, 'let me in! Let me in!'" she said.

JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY

Her parents called the police, who retrieved Karen's children from school and took them to a Safe House run by Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton's Providence House Domestic Violence Services in Ocean County. Karen and her children stayed there a few weeks, until she secured a restraining order.

At Providence House, she and the children attended counseling and received specialized services. Providence House legal advocates



◀ Rachel Johnston is the community affairs manager of Providence House Domestic Violence Services in Ocean County.

accompanied Karen to her court dates as she petitioned for the restraining order. She participated in support groups and found comfort in learning that other women shared her struggle and grew stronger as they recovered. Providence House also ensured her family had happy holidays, providing gifts for the kids when Karen's finances were tight.

"Providence House gave me a safe place to stay, clothing for the kids, food, everything we needed, even right down to the toys. My

kids loved that they made friends there. It was like making the best of a bad situation," she remembered. "If it was not for that support, I would still be in that relationship. Without everything they did for us, honestly from my heart, I would not be the person I am today."

Even after they left the Safe House, Karen programmed Providence House's 24/7 hotline into her phone.

"I always knew they were just a phone call away - and I did call," she said. "There are a lot of gray

PROVIDENCE HOUSE
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
SERVICES
2020 HIGHLIGHTS

14,078

Direct service hours provided to individuals and their children impacted by domestic violence

470

Individuals impacted by domestic violence and their children were provided shelter

5,844

Calls fielded by the domestic violence hotline

1,880

Individuals received domestic violence training/education



areas, where I wouldn't know if something violated the restraining order. I would see his car go by my house. Is that a violation? Because he's allowed to drive in the street. So I would call the hotline. They were always so patient and kind."

That was 17 years ago. Karen is now divorced and her kids are grown. But she feels so thankful for the life-saving services she received at Providence House that two years ago, she began organizing ongoing fundraisers and donation drives for them.

PAYING IT FORWARD

"I said from Day 1, when I stepped in that shelter, 'If I ever get in a position where I can give back, I will,'" she said. It took a long time to do so, because her ex-husband battled her for custody until their children were grown, saddling her with legal costs that prevented Karen from fully reclaiming her life for years. Such financial abuse is a common control tactic of abusers, said Danielle Meyer, director of Providence House-Ocean.

Still, in just the past two years, Karen's fundraisers, basket raffles, T-shirt sales and more have raised about \$7,000 in cash and in-kind donations for Providence House-Ocean.

"The gratification I get from being able to give back to an organization that literally saved my life and my kids, there's no price tag on that," she said. "This is a very meaningful thing for me."

All of Providence House's confidential services are free, and the need for them is greater now than ever. Domestic violence has become a pandemic within the COVID-19 pandemic, because during community lockdowns and quarantines, victims were trapped at home with their abusers. That's why Karen's support is especially appreciated.

"Although COVID-19 affected most fundraisers, Karen pressed on, adapted to a virtual format and had her most successful event! Those funds couldn't have come at a better time for Providence House. She is a

superhero in our eyes as well!" said Rachel Johnston, Providence House-Ocean's community affairs manager.

Karen is now engaged to a man she's dated for six years. Her kids love him and see every day what a healthy relationship looks like. They see their mother's strength, resilience, and unwavering support for them - and they add to Karen's Wonder Woman collection.

"I've been fighting this fight, really, my whole life," Karen said. "A relationship should not be prison. It should not be fear. It should not be horror. It should not be control. I'm free from all of that now. I just want happiness. And I have it."

FOR INFORMATION about Providence House Domestic Violence Services, call (732) 244-8259 in Ocean County or (609) 871-7551 in Burlington County.

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

REVENUE + EXPENSES. Following is a pre-audit summary of revenues and expenses for the 12-month period ending December 31, 2020.* Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton continues to be fiscally responsible, fulfilling the stewardship expected by our funders and donors. Approximately 12.8% of our budget is spent on centralized administrative costs.

REVENUES BY MAJOR SOURCE

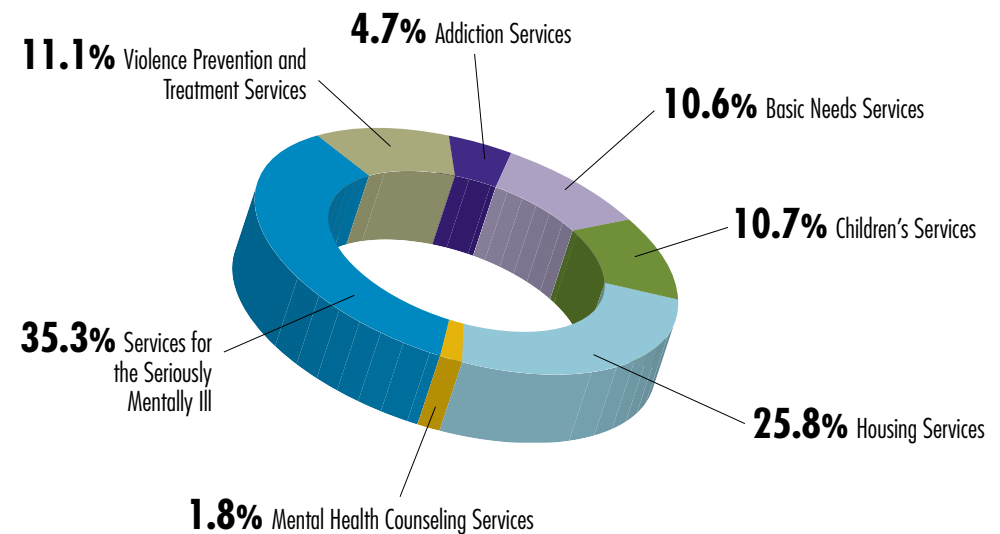
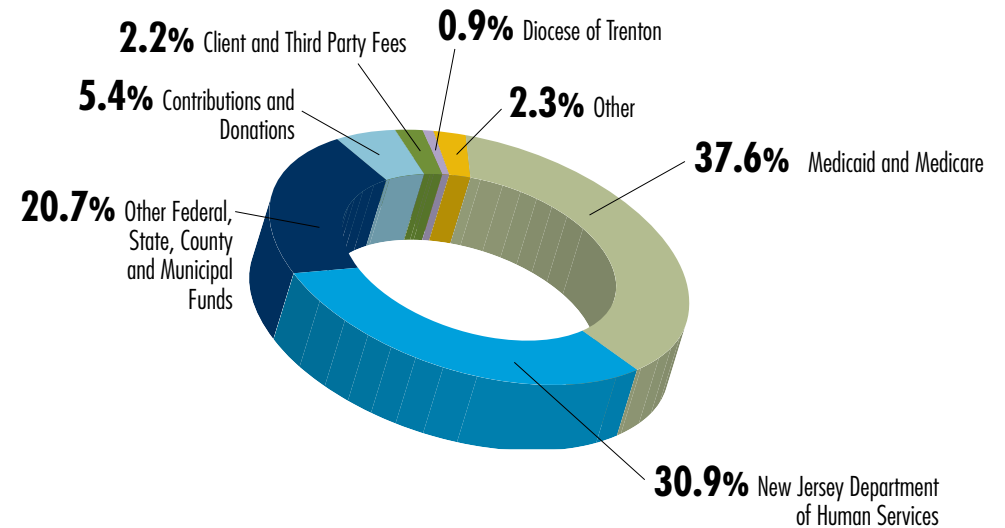
2020

Medicaid and Medicare	\$17,988,969
New Jersey Department of Human Services	\$14,779,412
Other Federal, State, County and Municipal Funds	\$9,880,970
Contributions and Donations	\$2,561,567
Client and Third Party Fees	\$1,068,468
Diocese of Trenton	\$450,839
Other	\$1,090,491
TOTAL PROGRAM REVENUE	\$47,820,716

EXPENSES BY SERVICE GROUP

2020

Addiction Services	\$2,227,145
Basic Needs Services	\$4,978,146
Children's Services	\$5,045,217
Housing Services	\$12,144,487
Mental Health Counseling Services	\$876,798
Services for the Seriously Mentally Ill	\$16,650,101
Violence Prevention and Treatment Services	\$5,231,617
TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES	\$47,153,511
PROGRAM SURPLUS	\$667,205



* A full financial statement may be obtained by writing to: Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton; Attn: George Bontcue, Associate Executive Director/Fiscal Affairs; 383 West State Street, PO Box 1423; Trenton, NJ 08607-1423; GBontcue@cctrenton.org



Here is the sample language for making a bequest to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton:

"I give and bequeath to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton:

the sum of \$ _____ ; or _____ percent of my estate; or the property described herein to establish/add to the _____ Fund.

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 _____".

TO DISCUSS leaving a legacy gift, contact Nancy Tompkins, director of Development and Marketing, (609) 394-5181, ext. 1161, or ntompkins@cctrenton.org.

2020 DONORS

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, would like to thank the individuals, corporations, and foundations that supported our mission in 2020. The following list contains donors who contributed \$500 or more to the mission of Catholic Charities.

We extend our sincere gratitude to ALL who gave generously throughout the year. Please know that each contribution is valued and appreciated. We would also like to thank our more than 1,185 volunteers for donating more than 10,004 hours in 2020.



LEGACY CIRCLE

Planned Gifts to Catholic Charities

Estate of Marie "Mimi" Cairns
Estate of Lillian D. Olup

VISIONARY CIRCLE

\$100,000+

Anonymous

SHAREHOLDER CIRCLE

\$50,000–99,999

Catholic Charities USA
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

HERITAGE CIRCLE

\$25,000–49,999

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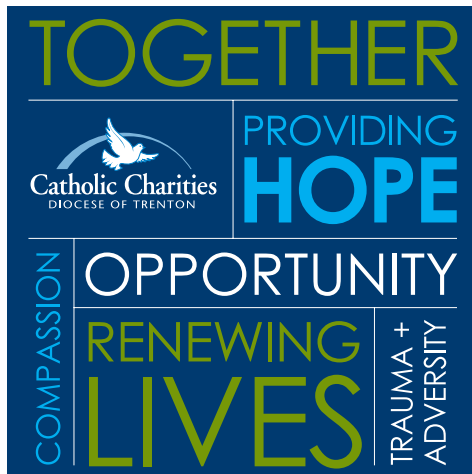
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Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope

It is with great pleasure that we announce plans for our signature fundraiser, the Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope. While we hoped to return to a live event, we felt it was important for us to keep everyone safe – thus, we will be enjoying from the comforts of our own homes once again!

On Thursday, September 9, 2021, we will honor some of our community partners who inspire and offer hope to those we serve. We will recognize their efforts to support our mission of eliminating poverty, trauma, and adversity in our community. The event will also include entertainment, raffles, a silent auction, and much more!

www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/GABOH2021