

WELCOMING AFGHAN EVACUEES

and Helping Them Heal

After a harrowing departure from their homes and a grueling 6,778-mile journey to safety, the first evacuees from Afghanistan began arriving at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JBMDL) on August 25th. As Operation Allies got underway, employees of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton were there, ready to support the mission.

“When the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops alerted us that JBMDL would be host to a number of Afghan guests, we quickly mobilized our CCT team to support the Operation,” said Susan Loughery, Associate Executive Director of Operations. “Right away, our Children and Family Services team began providing morale, wellness and recreational activities to the Afghans being temporarily housed there. Many of them are children and there are also a large number of pregnant women,” she noted.

“What we know about children is that allowing them to be children, to play, builds their resilience,” said Caryn Hirsch, Clinical Director for Children and Family Services. “The Afghan children are experiencing trauma and trauma responses. Providing art supplies, hula hoops, sidewalk chalk, soccer balls, and toys allows the children to play and act like children. This is a gentle reminder that their lives may have changed but they are being permitted to be children, and do not have to take care of any of the adult responsibility,” she said.

Our Community Services team has been collecting and delivering the outpouring of donations that are coming in from CCT supporters. Service Area Director Arnold Valentin is responsible for the logistics. “This is a huge undertaking. This is a population new to our country. They came with just the clothes on their backs. We created an Amazon Wish List that has received hundreds of donations from Catholic Charities’ supporters,” he said. “The generosity of our donors is overwhelming. They always help us meet the need and are true to our mission of serving everyone,” he said.

Loughery said monetary donations from CCT supporters and partners have been used to purchase equipment for



▲ Arnold Valentin and Jennifer Leip loading a truck full of donations for the Afghan evacuees

barber shops, salons and activities for the children. They also set up a PA system so the women could listen to music and have a concert. “These are all healing activities critical to overall wellness,” she said. “The reaction of the children is amazing. They are so happy when they see us and are so thankful for the things we bring them,” said Valentin.

“We have also been providing technical support to connect the Joint Base to the local infrastructure of systems and services,” said Loughery. “So many individuals and organizations have answered the call to support Operation Allies. The Intra-agency Coordinating Council has been working seamlessly to develop collaborative solutions and systems for the guests.” Lisha Loo-Morgan, Parish Services and Volunteer Coordinator, has been working to help coordinate the hundreds of individuals in the community who have volunteered to provide services and help the evacuees. Many employees of CCT have been helping with the wellness activities. Service Area Director of Children and Family Services Mary Pettrow has been providing Trauma Informed Readiness for these employees to make certain they are ready for their assignments on the Joint Base.

One challenge early in Operation Allies was ensuring the health of the guests arriving during the COVID-19 pandemic.



A Message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Every year, as the holidays approach, I often find myself having conflicting feelings – while I love the idea of a turkey at Thanksgiving, presents under the Christmas tree and the ball dropping to welcome the New Year, I cannot help but think about those less fortunate – particularly, those we serve.

Thankfully, we have an amazing team that persevered through a year of adversity and made our mission possible – even though a pandemic, natural disasters and a humanitarian crisis tried to make things impossible. Our staff made sure that those who have fallen on hard times had a meal. They made sure that someone struggling with addiction or mental illness received treatment. And they saved someone who was fleeing domestic violence ensuring that they had a safe place to land.

Fortunately, we have donors whose kindness and generosity is unwavering. Every time we called upon them, they showed up. They are the reason we can continue the life-saving work that we do and their commitment to our mission keeps us going.

This year, for the first time in my tenure at Catholic Charities, we were called upon by our country to assist with aiding the Afghan families arriving in our area. We have been asked to help with Morale, Wellness and Recreation. Since we understand the effects of trauma, both physically and mentally, we utilized our expertise to provide specialized care for over 6,000 children and their parents as well. It was heartwarming to meet the families and children when I visited the Base. The language barrier did not diminish their desire to express their gratefulness, truly a humbling moment. I was so proud of our team for their dedication and selflessness and of course, the generosity of our supporters that makes a difference in how far and high we can reach.

As 2022 approaches and we reflect on the challenges of this past year, let's remember one thing – the work we do saves lives. Thank you for being part of that.

With gratitude,

Marlene Laó-Collins
Executive Director



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The Spirit is published quarterly by Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton's Development and Marketing Department.

Our Mission:

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, inspired by our Catholic faith and shared values, restores dignity and independence to individuals and families, especially the poor and vulnerable, through service, advocacy and community building.



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FOR MY BABY AND ME

100 Moms and Counting

In 2017, Capital Health asked Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton to partner with them to help create a ground-breaking program to help pregnant women and new mothers recover from addiction. The collaboration includes several other partners to ensure that every need of these women is met, including: hospital care, housing, medication, childcare, legal aid, and basic everyday needs such as clothing and diapers. The goal of For My Baby and Me is to help women recover from their addiction by providing wraparound services and using medication-assisted treatment and counseling so they can provide their child with a stable family life.

Four years and 100 moms later, the program is going strong and proud of this milestone. “We are so blessed to be partnered with Capital Health, HomeFront, Henry J. Austin Health Center, Rescue Mission of Trenton and Trenton Health Team,” said Lisa Merritt, Chief Nurse Executive. “With their help, we can provide every component of recovery that a new mom would need.”

One of the incredible aspects of this program is how accessible getting help is - a woman places a call to the hotline, a specialist explains the program, a pick-up service is offered, and the mom is transported to Catholic Charities in Trenton to begin her one-year journey to wellness.

Merritt said one of the biggest challenges was helping the women overcome the stigma that is associated with their condition and having them understand that if they have a setback with their recovery that they are not a failure. Another challenge is the need for supplies. “All of our supplies come from donations. With 13 moms and several babies in the program right now, imagine the number of diapers, baby wipes, and clothes that are needed, not to mention, the bigger ticket items like strollers and car seats,” she said. “But we’re very fortunate to have amazing donors who consistently check in with us and ask what we need.”

For the other challenges that the moms are facing, Merritt credits the team and the medical staff. “We teach foundational tools to overcome some of the barriers to recovery - in a judgement free environment. These women already feel the shame and indignity that comes



▲ Lisa Merritt welcomes the newest member of the For My Baby and Me program.

with the territory of their circumstances - not just societally, but from family and friends. We certainly don’t need to add to that.”

Having served 100 moms, the program administrators have been able to collect and analyze data. They have discovered if a woman enrolls in the program prior to delivery, the length of hospital stay for their baby is considerably shorter. In fact, 71% of the babies were discharged along with their mothers. “The moms always want their babies to go home with them - so it’s important to encourage early enrollment,” said Merritt.

Merritt and the team are enthusiastic by the success of this program and hope it continues to be funded for years to come. “I can’t wait to serve the next 100 moms and 100 more and 100 more...” said Merritt.

FOR INFORMATION about the For My Baby and Me program, call Lisa Merritt, Chief Nurse Executive, at (609) 396-4557, ext. 2445.

A HAPPY LIFE IS NO LONGER OUT OF REACH

Thanks to Early Intervention Support Services



Growing up in northeast Philadelphia, Madison Mitchell knew she was different from the other kids, but it became more evident early in grade school when she started getting bullied. “Even though I had ADHD, I wasn’t a bad kid. I was nice to everyone and just wanted to be like everyone else,” said Madison. What made it worse were the teachers who seemed to justify the bullying. “Sometimes I would go to school and my hair wouldn’t be brushed or it would be knotty.” The teachers would say, “Well of course they are going to pick on you because your hair isn’t combed.”

By the time she was 12, Madison’s mother lost her job and at the age of 14, her grandfather passed away. “That’s when I really went into a severe depression,” she said. “I really struggled in school and by the time I was a sophomore, I was diagnosed with ADHD and bi-polar disorder.” Although she was prescribed medication for the ADHD, she almost failed out of high school. “What saved me was my English teacher, Mr. B. He shared with me that he had ADHD as well and he really took me under his wing because he knew what I was going through.” After graduating, Madison was accepted into a Performing Arts school in New York City.

“It was an awful experience. There was a history of abuse at the school that I didn’t know about,” Madison said, “and what made matters worse was that the teachers tried to tell us they were treating us badly because they wanted to prepare us for an industry that was brutal.” Needless to say, she started to fall into a deeper depression and she had her first manic episode. “I engaged in dangerous behavior, including over using Adderall. It would keep me awake so I would stay in that manic state versus being depressed.”

Madison said teachers picked on her physical appearance. “I was basically bullied into an eating disorder because of how I looked. And what was confusing about it was that while I was being told to lose weight, I was being objectified because I had a curvy physique.” This mixed messaging further complicated Madison’s self-image and self-esteem. She knew if she stayed at that school, she would have killed herself. “I started to have irrational thoughts and actions like walking through bad parts of New York City late at night or calling my mom at 4:00 a.m. saying I wanted to jump in front of a train.”

Madison decided to leave the school after nine months. Not long after, she was contacted by other students who felt mistreated at the school as well, validating her own experience. She tried attending community college, but couldn’t stay focused.

One bright spot in Madison’s life was Michael, who she met online. “Michael and I started out as friends and then it became more serious.” He lived in Alabama but they decided to give it a chance so he travelled 1,000 miles to be with her. “Michael came to Philadelphia and we lived with my mom and sister for a year. It was hard in the beginning, but thankfully everyone gets along now,” said Madison.

ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE DREAM

Madison and Michael eventually got their own place but they struggled financially – which led to deeper emotional issues. “I was trying to receive help from an agency in Philadelphia but the pandemic hit, so the services they were providing were put on hold,” she said. Michael was having some challenges as well. He received advice from someone that there were services at Catholic Charities in Hamilton, NJ, so the pair decided to move to Hamilton so Michael could start receiving counseling. He enrolled in a 30-day program at the Early Intervention Support Services program. Half way through the program, he told Madison she should do it as well. “Michael was amazed at all the help he was receiving, he said I should try it.” Madison arrived at the facility on Whitehorse Road and she was welcomed immediately. “I couldn’t believe it. I’d been through other programs and no place ever said come in and let’s get you through the intake process right now.” She said her expectations were pretty low because she hadn’t had good experiences at other agencies.



▲ Visitors find friendly, trauma-informed care behind the blue doors of EISS.

“We pride ourselves on our service delivery model,” said Danica Rivello, Director of Crisis Services at EISS. “Our center for mental health provides the ability to access services in real time if and when an individual is willing and able to accept help,” added Rivello.

At other facilities, Madison said she never felt at ease, “I felt like I was a burden to them.” At Catholic Charities, she felt the opposite. “I knew right away that they cared. The counseling services were great, they listened and I felt like they gave me good feedback.” Adding, “My counselor made me feel comfortable and not judged.” The clinical team at EISS works from a trauma-informed approach. “We assume that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma. Trauma-Informed care recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual’s life,” said Rivello.

Madison recently graduated from her 30-day program and feels great. She is now enrolled in school to become certified to teach early childhood education. “I never felt like I could complete school because of my panic attacks. But after my counseling, I understand why they were happening. The counselors helped me put a name to my feelings – all of which stemmed from the traumas of my childhood experiences.”

Today, Madison teaches preschoolers drama and music, her true passions. And at 26 years old, she and Michael are engaged and very happy. “I’m excited to live the life I always wanted and what I always dreamt of when I was 12 years old – being happy and comfortable. I’m living the dream of what I knew life could be.”

FOR INFORMATION about Early Intervention Support Services (EISS), call Director of Crisis Services, Danica Rivello at (609) 256-4200, ext. 7211.

WELCOMING AFGHAN EVACUEES

(continued from cover)

“Our Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Expansion Nurses, funded under the CDC-NJ DOH initiative in conjunction with Central Jersey Family Health Consortium, have been supporting guests with public health education. The base teams have been incredibly efficient and effective in the COVID planning, resulting in a very high vaccination rate for the guests. RAPPS Pharmacy and our hospital partners RWJ Barnabas Health and Rutgers UBHC have been instrumental in helping meet critical pharmacy needs. Capital Health has made donations to the guests as well. Additionally, we are helping develop a network of legal representatives to educate and orient the evacuees to the US legal systems,” said Loughery. She noted CCT will not be handling the immigration process for the Afghan guests. “That has been centralized through federal entities, but CCT will be helping them transition to their destinations around the country and the globe. Even though individuals and families are moving through the process of resettlement very efficiently, the Operation will be in place for quite some time because of the large number of the guests and the breadth of their needs,” she said.

“Catholic Charities is proud of the role we are playing in Operation Allies,” said Loughery. “We are reaching out to these guests during a very distressing time in their lives and, hopefully, helping them process what they’ve been through and giving them hope for the future.”



▲ The CCT team is honored to be part of Operation Allies.

FOR INFORMATION on how to help the Afghan evacuees, please visit: www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org/afghan-refugees-humanitarian-crisis.

DELAWARE HOUSE (PART II)

Providing Healing for Over 50 Years

When we left off in the last issue of *The Spirit*, Delaware House had outgrown its home in the Victorian mansion on the banks of the Delaware River. In 1976, in time for its 25th anniversary, the collection of mental health services moved into a brand new building. From the cramped quarters in Burlington City and myriad satellite offices around the county, all the programs of Delaware House were reunited under one roof of a sprawling 23,000 square foot building in Westampton, NJ.

A Partial Care program participant, Michael McCauley, remembers moving from the Riverbank to the big, new facility. “It was like going to a new school,” he said. Michael started attending the Partial Care program after he was discharged from a psychiatric hospital in 1991. “I used to drink alcohol,” he said. “I used to drink a lot and that would bring up the voices. Then I wound up in a hospital,” recalled Michael. “When I got out, they took me to Delaware House for counseling to see if I would like it.” Thirty years later, Michael continues as a participant in the group psychiatric rehabilitation program three days a week. “It’s good. You can talk about whatever you need to. You get it all out and it helps.”

Since opening its doors in 1971, Delaware House has been expanding the types of services it provides. This wraparound approach has had a positive impact on several areas of Michael’s life. “They helped me stop drinking. I was 19 years clean,” said Michael. When he relapsed, he was able to access addiction services again. “When I went back to drinking, they helped me again. I came back to the program and said, ‘I needed help’ and they gave me help.”

Michael also benefited from the Vocational Services and Supported Employment program. “Delaware House has a good program for employment. They helped me get three jobs. I worked nine years at Pathmark and when that store closed, they helped me find a new job.” He currently works part-time at a Burlington store pricing and putting out the merchandise. “Catholic Charities helped me get my own place and they helped me get a tutor who worked with me on my reading. I like to read the newspaper,” he said. “They have helped me out a real lot. I like Delaware House in my life.”



▲ Delaware House provides essential wraparound services to address behavioral health as well as basic needs.

Wanda Haddock began participating in Delaware House’s Partial Care program in 2006. “Before that, I was in and out of Ancora (Psychiatric Hospital),” said Wanda. “I was in and out. I went back and forth a lot.” She currently attends counseling sessions two days a week at Delaware House. She said she may start three days a week soon. “I like going to group. You can take the advice of the people who are talking. But I have learned not to take everything somebody says to heart.” Wanda lives in her own apartment on the grounds of Ancora with support from Catholic Charities. “I have my own apartment and wash my own clothes. Every Sunday, I go to church from 9 a.m. to 12:30.” Wanda also enjoys watching preachers and pastors on tv and listening to Christian music. Wanda really likes her case manager. “She is respectful and caring. She cheers me up when I am down or depressed and she gives good advice. All the staff are nice. People here are open to helping you.”

Stability and trust are two pillars of the Delaware House’s Partial Care program. Part of what keeps participants coming back is the fact that their longevity with the program is matched by that of the staff. Erika Palmer has been a member of the Behavioral Health Services team for 26 years. She has worked in the Partial Care program, as a member of the Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) team and has provided

Going Virtual Again Made Success “Possible”

To keep everyone safe again, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton treated supporters to an entertaining and informative online fundraiser. This year’s event paid tribute to community partners and a dedicated staff who wouldn’t allow a lingering pandemic or a natural disaster to get in the way of serving the most vulnerable among us. Our doors stayed open and the team was there.

The event was held on September 9th and viewed by over 500 people whose generosity helped raise more than \$240,000! These funds will help support over 60 programs in Burlington, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean counties. “Once again, our virtual Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope, ‘Mission: Possible,’ drew participants from throughout our four counties and beyond,” said Marlene Laó-Collins, Executive Director. “It was a phenomenal celebration of our dynamic honorees and highlighted the extraordinary work of four of our programs. And completing our mission is only possible with the support of our generous donors.”



This year’s deserving honorees were all extremely humbled by this gesture. The 2021 award recipients were: Tricia (Client Achievement); Donna and John Kuchinski (Humanitarian Award); SobelCo (Corporate Citizen of the Year); Kathleen Spivey (Burlington Light of Hope); Mark Bolgar and Bethanne Warrack (Mercer Light of Hope); Damian Sylvia (Monmouth Light of Hope); and Elaine Molen (Ocean Light of Hope).

In case you missed the event, watch it at www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/events.

FOR INFORMATION on supporting Catholic Charities, contact Interim Development and Marketing Director Jennifer Leip at (609) 394-5181, ext. 1137.

residential services. “A lot of things have changed over the years, but our focus has always been the same – we are here to treat the consumer,” she said. “They are our first priority. Our care and compassion remain consistent.”

Kelli Madison has been with Delaware House for 20 years and attributes its success to its wraparound services. “We provide intra-agency referrals, residential supports and transportation. We have a pharmacy on site and a physician here one day a week. We also provide breakfast and lunch,” she said. “Our support is like an umbrella. We’ve got our consumers covered.”

And that umbrella was tested during the storm that was COVID-19. Madison was a Partial Care supervisor when the lockdowns began. “We were really lucky to have such a supportive team during COVID. We did not miss a day,” she said. “No consumer was left unnoticed. We started home visits and delivered food. We made sure everyone had a way to stay connected. We got our consumers smartphones and started telehealth over Zoom... We kept so many people out of the hospital.” She noted that program participants were able to call on the skills they had developed during their years in Partial Care. “Whether it was cooking skills or ways of handling life’s stressors, our consumers had the tools in place and were able to use them to survive.”

“Very few of our consumers contracted COVID,” noted Palmer. “We were in constant contact. For those who were medically vulnerable with pre-existing conditions, we made sure they stayed alive. We checked in. We reinforced the safety-messaging,” she said. “At the beginning of the pandemic, our consumers didn’t think they were going to make it,” said Sharon King, who has been on the BHS team for 16 years. “But they did. We all worked through it together. They discovered their strengths and coping skills. And they supported each other.”

Delaware House began as a day program for people with mental health concerns. Fifty years later, it is a robust network of services and a community of people who care for one another.

FOR INFORMATION on Delaware House, contact Alicia McNeil, Interim Director of Partial Care Services, Director of Psychosocial Rehabilitation at (609) 267-9339 ext. 5129 or amcneil@cctrenton.org.



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