

ON THE FARM

Growth and New Beginnings

In 2015, in the heart of Trenton, a collection of non-profits and volunteers began slowly transforming an abandoned factory site into an organic agricultural oasis. After the soil had been remediated, crops were planted. Ever since, Capital City Farm has been producing thousands of pounds of fresh produce. “We give the food away free to the people in the community,” said Walter Roberts Jr. Even though he speaks softly, you can hear pride in that statement. To say he enjoys his job would be an understatement. “I love to plant stuff. I love to see things grow and harvest them.”

Walter has been working on this farm for about five years. Early on, he said he worked for free, volunteering with the different organizations that ran the farm. Today — Walter is employed full-time by the Mercer County Park Commission, which manages the farm. “When Mercer County came out to take over the property, they asked who was maintaining it. I was. So they hired me.”

On a January morning, the 2.5-acre farm looks dormant, but Walter can attest, there is plenty going on. He points to a patch of winter rye growing in the corner and explains how it’s helping restore the soil. He walks through the frame of a greenhouse under construction and describes the seedlings it will house when it’s complete. He’s got manure to finish spreading in the hoop house...

Like the land he tills, Walter’s life has also undergone major restoration. He explained that his issues with substance use began when he was very young. “I started drinking when I was five or six years old. I had my first beer at a cookout.” He shakes his head. “I was a full-blown alcoholic by the time I was 11.” In addition, Walter has bipolar disorder and severe anxiety.

Before coming to Catholic Charities for help last spring, Walter had been in and out of the hospital. “I was crying, breaking down, struggling with anxiety. I thought I was going to die and kept having panic attacks. I lost most of my friends.” Someone at TASK, the soup kitchen next



▲ Walter Roberts Jr. has worked on Capital City Farm for almost five years. For several months when he was homeless, Walter slept in this small shed on the grounds.

door to the farm where he got meals, suggested Walter get help from Catholic Charities’ Early Intervention Support Services in Hamilton. “At EISS, they started helping me right away,” Walter said. Counselors at EISS referred him to the Partial Care program at CCT’s Clinton campus, just a few blocks from the farm.

“In the beginning, it was hard,” said Walter. “My anxiety was so bad I couldn’t be there physically. I had to call in. There was a lot going on with me. I was in very bad shape. Phil helped me out a lot. He calmed me down. He got me to start speaking in the classes. Phil did a lot.” Phil Parish is the counselor who worked with Walter while he was in the program.

“I started to see a little clearer after the withdrawal from alcohol,” he said. “Then they helped me get my prescriptions and medications right.” He noted the positivity and reassurance he received from all the staff he encountered helped him move forward. “Imani (Walker) encouraged me and helped me. Tjurra (Roberts) encouraged me, everyone did.” Walter said he is so grateful for that support.

When Walter showed up to group counseling sessions, no one knew how dire his living conditions were.



A Message from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During this time of Lent we reflect on the passion of Jesus, His teachings and the ultimate sacrifice He made for us. We are reminded that His love for us brought forth resurrection, new life and hope. We are all called to follow in His footsteps of service in love to our neighbors that we too may bring forth new life and hope in others.

With spring on the horizon we can exhale (for a moment) and appreciate how we have not just maneuvered through some tough times – but thrived in so many ways. In less than six months, we’ve administered over 2,000 lifesaving vaccinations to an underserved population. The number of domestic violence survivors who came to us for safety tripled – yes TRIPLED! And, we’ve successfully helped over 13,000 refugees assimilate to a new life in our country – many of them young children who will now have a chance to live and flourish in a safe community.

As we celebrate the season of faith, hope and renewal – it’s the perfect time for us to thank our donors and volunteers who make our mission possible. Some of you give time, some make a donation and some bring valuable knowledge and experience to help us move forward. Now more than ever, we need every one of you because we cannot do this life-saving work without YOU.

During this time of year, I think of one of my favorite quotes from Lady Bird Johnson – “Where flowers bloom, so does hope.” May flowers blossom abundantly in your lives. Have a blessed and happy Easter.

With gratitude,

Marlene Laó-Collins
Executive Director



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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.



Clothing Pickup Available

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton and Recycle America have joined forces to provide a new clothing pick-up service. That’s right, someone will come to your door to collect your clothing and shoes. All items will be donated to those in need in our community.

Pickup schedule:

Monday	Ocean County
Tuesday	Burlington County
Wednesday	Monmouth County
Thursday	Mercer County



To make a reservation, please call (609) 906-0004 or racworld2015@gmail.com at least three days prior to pickup. Thank you!

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A WOUNDED HEART

Healed at El Centro

“Mateo” grew up in Nahuala, a tiny town in southwestern Guatemala. When he was 17, he left his home for a better life in the United States. His journey across the border took him first to Los Angeles, CA, and then to New York City, where he lived with family members. Eventually, he made his way to Trenton.

On a Saturday night, while out with friends, “Mateo” was robbed at knifepoint. “Mateo” recalls the street was crowded with people when a man approached him and demanded money. The man pushed him, grabbed his shirt and stabbed him in the chest with a knife. “I just remember the flashing lights,” said “Mateo”. “I didn’t know if it was the police or an ambulance...” He said it’s the last thing he remembers before waking up in a hospital the following Tuesday with 48 stitches over his heart. He had been in a coma for three days.

“It is not unusual for immigrants to be targeted for crimes,” said Sandra Pinto-Simko, a Client Services Coordinator. “People assume they will have trouble opening a bank account and are carrying all their money with them.”

A SILVER LINING

After his recovery, “Mateo” came to El Centro to learn English. While attending ESL classes, he discovered he could get help from Immigration Services there too. That is when “Mateo” learned he was eligible for a U visa, a provision that grants immigration status and the possibility of permanent resident status to foreign nationals who have been victims of a crime in the U.S. that resulted in physical or mental pain and suffering. Because he had cooperated with police after his attack and helped identify his assailant, “Mateo” qualified for the U visa.

It took four years for “Mateo” to receive immigration status, because only 10,000 U visas are granted each year. After that, the team at El Centro helped “Mateo” apply for and get his green card. The staff were also able to petition for “Mateo”’s wife immigration status too under the U visa. “El Centro helped me with everything I needed. I never had any papers, but they helped me,” he said.



▲ After a traumatic attack, “Mateo” built his life back with El Centro’s help and now works as a line cook.

“When I lived in Trenton, I didn’t trust the people I saw in the street. I felt like someone was following me.” Counselors from El Centro helped “Mateo” cope with the anxiety he felt as the victim of a violent assault. “Mateo” currently works as a line cook. He and his wife have two young daughters. “Mateo” was able to move his family out of Trenton and into Hamilton Township, where he feels safer.

“Mateo” says he recommends El Centro’s services to people he knows. “I tell them at El Centro everybody is friendly. And they take care of us.”

FOR INFORMATION on El Centro and the services it provides, call (609) 394-2056.

NJ HOPE AND HEALING

Offering Emotional Support When It's Needed Most

Whether they were motivated by loneliness, isolation, fear or frustration, New Jerseyans reached out for Hope and Healing Crisis Counseling nearly 64,000 times during the past two years. Counselors from Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Metuchen, Newark, Paterson and Trenton worked together providing disaster response counseling free of charge to any one in New Jersey who needed support.

When the program started in April 2020, the pandemic was gaining steam. Daily briefings and infection rates ruled the airwaves and fear in public spaces was palpable. That's when the NJ Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Disaster and Terrorism Branch (NJ DHS DMHAS DTB) contacted NJ Catholic Charities for help restoring calm. "The success of our disaster case management efforts after Hurricane Sandy on top of effective response to previous disasters in the state gave us a solid reputation as an organization that can rapidly deploy help in times of crisis," said Program Director Noelle Davies, a NJ Disaster Response Crisis Counselor.

So what did people get when they contacted Hope and Healing? They received emotional support, connections within the community, and ideas for coping with how the pandemic was impacting their mental health. Some learned self-care tips and stress

reduction techniques. Some spoke to a counselor one-on-one. Some attended support groups or activity sessions via Zoom and some were referred to other agencies within the community who could provide the type of help they needed.

A WELL-INFORMED NEIGHBOR

Hope and Healing's counseling takes a neighbor-to-neighbor approach. The teams providing the counseling are not clinicians, but have been trained to provide short-term, peer-based support. "Our services usually begin with a conversation," explains Davies. "We provide a sympathetic ear and encourage people to express their true feelings." Since the services are anonymous and confidential, people can share freely, without worrying about being a burden or that their stories can be associated to their personal information. "We listen. That in and of itself can make a big difference. Having a compassionate connection with someone when you're feeling stressed is helpful," said Davies. "And when we find someone has concrete needs, we make a referral," she said. "Hope and Healing provides an effective way to reach community members who need support but might not think to reach out for this type of help because of some pre-conceived notions or stigma they may have about 'therapy,'" she said.

A collaboration with NJ DHS DMHAS DTB finances NJ Hope and Healing through a grant from FEMA and SAMHSA. Throughout the course of the pandemic, funding was extended four times. A fifth extension, one that would see the program continue through June 23, 2022, is currently under consideration.

Davies and her team know this pandemic will be impacting the mental health and well-being of vulnerable populations long after the federal grant expires. "Catholic Charities housing program services have begun to receive upwards of 100 calls a week with requests for rental assistance now that the eviction moratorium has ended so we have partnered with these programs to offer emotional support," she said. She also noted senior citizens, who experienced severe isolation because of social distancing protocols and a lack of access to technologies, will continue to need support. With these people in mind, Davies sought and received



▲ Crisis Counselor Francesca Valentin shares coping strategies with children and parents during a Learning Camp in Asbury Park.



▲ Crisis Counseling Team Lead Stephanie Mata (from left) and Crisis Counselors Francesca Valentin and Dana Naturale

alternative funding from a private bequest and the Ocean County Office of Senior Services to keep Hope and Healing alive within the Diocese of Trenton.

Contributions made by Catholic Charities' donors who gave to support disaster relief will lengthen the timeline of current services which include counseling, resource referrals and support offered to participants in partnership with other CCT programs, including housing services. For example, Hope and Healing will be able to continue its partnership with the Monmouth County Linkages Transitional Housing Program to provide a support group for low-income families called Chats and Crafts that will combine fun activities with discussions about stress management and coping during a pandemic. Additionally, because Davies secured a grant from the Ocean County Office of Senior Services, the team can continue assisting Ocean County seniors through outreach, information and resource referral, telephone reassurance calls and socialization via groups and friendly visits.

"Having private funding from our donors allows more freedom to shift and respond to the needs of the community as they arise. Because life during a pandemic is ever-changing, we are grateful for resources that will allow us to respond to needs within the community without the restrictions of contracted mandates," said Davies.

FOR INFORMATION about Hope and Healing, contact Noelle Davies at (732) 204-6510 or ndavies@cctrenton.org.

ON THE FARM

(continued from cover)

For seven months, he had been sleeping in a small wooden shed at the farm because he had nowhere else to go. "Every day I would wake up, wash up in a bucket and walk down to Catholic Charities for my program. Nobody knew I was homeless," he said. When the team at Partial Care found out, they helped Walter get an apartment. "It's beautiful," he said. "I have a little area that's my art studio and I got myself a t-shirt press so I could start a business designing shirts."

"Walter's was a remarkable transformation," said Parish. "His life is so quantifiably different. Not only does he have a job, he started his own t-shirt business. It is a great story of hope." For Parish, Walter demonstrates the power of the Partial Care program. "Walter has shown what can happen when you get the right help to a person when they need it. The wraparound services provided by Partial Care, the counseling, the housing, help with medication – can really lift someone up."



▲ Walter is already looking forward to summer when this straw covered field will yield fresh produce for the community.

Partial Care offers a wide range of psychiatric rehabilitation groups and activities for adults experiencing mental illness. Programs are also available for adults experiencing mental illness and substance use issues. In Mercer County, our Partial Care Program features additional components that integrate primary healthcare and employment services. If you or someone you know has a mental illness or substance use issues, contact our Access Help and Information Center at (800) 360-7711 for a program near you.

JOINT EFFORTS AT THE JOINT BASE

Helped Turn Refugees into Neighbors

Six months have passed since the first refugees fleeing Afghanistan arrived in the United States. Operation Allies Welcome, the first phase of the U.S. military's efforts to house and relocate the Afghan guests, has wound down in New Jersey. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported our efforts to welcome and sustain the 13,000 refugees during a traumatic and trying period in their lives.

"We were on the ground before day one," said Associate Executive Director of Operations Susan Loughery. "When Bill Canny called, we got right to work." Canny is the Executive Director of Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). "Our staff were right there when the planes landed with toys, crafts and art supplies for the children," she said. In the early days, as the Afghan guests were acclimating to life in Liberty Village on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, CCT staff supported the USCCB's mission of providing Morale, Wellness and Recreation (MWR). "Once USCCB was able to get its staff on site to take over MWR activities, we pivoted to support the guests with practical aspects of resettlement," said Loughery.

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

"We secured space and worked with local partners to set up a computer lab, provide vocational training and provide educational webinars," said Loughery. "We worked closely with the NJ State Police's Muslim Officers' Society to offer driver education classes. We were also pleased to partner with the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine's faculty to help the guests in medical professions learn how to establish their credentials so they can practice medicine here." Loughery said CCT nursing students worked with the Surgeon General's team providing nursing support. "We were able to engage the next generation of our workforce in caring for the most vulnerable in the community," she said.

Loughery said the network of state and local government agencies, faith-based organizations and businesses that came together to provide support to the Afghan guests in their time of need was vast. The



▲ The steady stream of contributions that came into our offices were welcomed at the Joint Base.

offices of U.S. Congressmen Andy Kim and Chris Smith, the NJ Departments of Health, Human Services and Children and Family Services and the Center for FaithJustice all jumped in to provide support. She noted RWJ Barnabas and Rapps Pharmacy contributed medical supplies.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY

"The response from our donors and the parishes has been truly heartwarming," said Jenn Leip, Interim Director of Development and Marketing. "Since August, we have collected more than \$100,000 in donations earmarked specifically to support the refugees. That funding was used to create recreational centers, theaters, barber shops and salons. It was also used to fund specific medical needs, like glasses and wheelchairs," she said. In addition to monetary gifts, the community rallied with donations of clothes, games, toys and arts & craft supplies. "We set up a wish list on Amazon and thousands of donations were delivered right to the Joint Base. A steady stream of contributions came in to our offices as well and were delivered weekly by Community Service Area Director Arnold Valentin and his team," she said. "Many of the guests fled with just the clothes on their backs and it was gratifying to see such an overwhelming response to meet their basic needs."

“Many of the guests were women and children,” said Loughery. “And there were also many pregnant women among the guests. We knew we needed to get baby supplies to ensure the newborn guests got a good start in life.” Board of Trustees member John Kuchinski and his wife Donna were instrumental in conducting Operation Babies Welcome, a drive that secured a truckload full of bassinets for safe sleeping, strollers and other infant necessities.

STAFF MEMBERS STEPPING UP

“We could not have accomplished all we did for the Afghan guests without the emphatic and enthusiastic response we received from the employees of Catholic Charities,” said Loughery. Service Area Director of Children and Family Services Mary Pettrow and Service Area Clinical Director of Children and Family Services Caryn Hirsch helped the Joint Base team problem solve and helped guests connect to the NJ Department of Children and Families infrastructure. Ada Orsorio provided a steady presence at the Community Resource and Resiliency Center (CRRC) and so many from the Providence House Domestic Violence Services, CAS and Children and Family Services teams volunteered to take shifts to provide comfort and assistance to the guests. Additionally, the NJ Hope and Healing team were regular visitors to provide support. Chief Nurse Executive Lisa Merritt and her nursing staff supported the Navy medical teams.



▲ Operation Babies Welcome collected vital supplies for newborns to give infant guests a great start at life.

Approximately 500 of the Afghan guests are resettling in New Jersey. The others have been relocated through resettlement centers around the country. Loughery noted that CCT will be actively involved in supporting the guests who remain in the state as they adjust to life here. “We will be working with the network of partners we created during Operation Allies Welcome to continue to support our new neighbors with information, vocational training and access to healthcare. We want to help them along their journeys and let them know the spirit of welcome remains strong.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Associate Executive Director of Operations Susan Loughery at (609) 394-5181 ext. 1166 or sloughery@cctrenton.org.



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