

## COMMITTING TO RECOVERY

### To Protect Her Family's Future

Depression drove Britney into addiction.

"I was so depressed I just wanted to numb all my feelings. At one point, I didn't even want to live any more," she said. "I started with pills. Then heroin. I was using for seven and a half months - four or five bags of heroin a day."



An unplanned pregnancy was the wake-up call she needed to begin recovery.

"I already wanted to get help. I didn't want to keep doing this for the rest of my life," she said. "So when I found out I was pregnant, it was scary. It was like a sign from God. I didn't want to hurt my baby, and I needed that driving force to free me from the way I was living for a long time."

Immediately, she began reaching out to addiction-recovery programs.

"Every place I called, no joke, said: 'we can't get you in now' or 'we have too many people as it is' or 'our wait time is six weeks, minimum,'" she recalled.

Indeed, the pandemic sent opioid deaths surging, as isolation and stress drove more people to drugs to cope. At the same time, many recovery programs closed facilities or cut services in response to the lockdown and resulting economic crisis.



▲ Britney and Jim Keashon, Project Free supervisor.

At Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center, where Britney gave birth in June, someone suggested she reach out to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton. Catholic Charities has a variety of addiction-recovery programs, all of which stayed open and fully operational through the pandemic. Services are available in-person and remotely through telehealth.

Within a day Britney was enrolled in Catholic Charities' Project Free, an intensive outpatient recovery program based in Mercer County. There, she began Medication-Assisted Treatment, or MAT, which is the use of FDA-approved medications in combination with evidence-based behavioral therapies. MAT has been proven to significantly reduce addiction and cravings, prevent relapses and re-establish healthy brain functioning. Catholic Charities received a state grant last summer to coordinate MAT services county-wide, with the goal of getting more people on the road to recovery.

Now nearly four months into her recovery, Britney is on an MAT drug that is safe for breastfeeding mothers. Her newborn son spent a few weeks in neonatal intensive care to make sure he had no lasting problems, but he's home and thriving now. Britney attends a women-only



## A Message from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As Thanksgiving, Christmas and the end of 2020 approach, I find myself reflecting on the past year. It's been a time like no other, forcing us to separate while we fervently sought ways to remain connected with our loved ones through Zoom, drive-by visits and more. I am grateful for our employees who proved they are real heroes by continuing to care for those who came to us for help during this difficult time.

I am grateful, too, to our donors, whose commitment to people in need remained strong through a tumultuous year. We simply cannot deny the human connection that binds us together no matter who we are, where we live, the faith we practice, the color of our skin or the language we speak. Amidst the fear of a deadly pandemic and the emotional and economic instability it created, we witnessed the steadfast dedication of our donors, who recognized the

needs of others and acted without hesitation for their good. This challenging year also underscored the sad reality that racism – a root cause of poverty among people of color – is not history but continues to fester. Yet people of good will acted to be a part of the solution in a peaceful, prayerful way.

As 2021 approaches, our collective prayers and action must continue as we work to eliminate poverty, trauma, racism and adversity to restore dignity and independence to individuals and families. I look forward to our continued partnership.

Warmly,

**Marlene Laó-Collins,**  
Executive Director



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

*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.*



### Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope

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# GOING VIRTUAL

## Online Benefit a Success

With in-person gatherings now a public health risk, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton shifted all our fundraising efforts this year online, consolidating four annual fundraisers into a single virtual event to ensure the safety of our supporters and staff.

Our inaugural Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope went off without a hitch on Sept. 30th. The 90-minute, live-streamed event raised \$310,000 – exceeding its \$260,000 goal – that will support more than 60 programs we offer in Burlington, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean counties.

New Jersey's own comedian and actor Joe Piscopo graciously volunteered to host, with more than 1,000 people tuning in. If you missed it, visit [www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org](http://www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org) to watch.



“It was a spectacular event that expanded our reach and shined attention on our honorees in a mighty way,” said Marlene Laó-Collins, executive director. “I extend my congratulations to them and my sincere gratitude to all who donated and watched. You made it a successful event.”

Our honorees were Robert (Client Achievement); Thomas J. and Dr. Judithann C. Keefe (Humanitarian Award); Stark & Stark (Corporate Citizen of the Year); Deacon James L. Casa (Burlington Light of Hope); Mary Jo Herbert (Mercer Light of Hope); Dr. Jack V. Kirnan (Monmouth Light of Hope); and the Oceanaire Women's Golf Association (Ocean Light of Hope).

**FOR INFORMATION** on supporting Catholic Charities, contact Development and Marketing Director Nancy Tompkins at (609) 394-5181, ext. 1161.



# Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope



▲ The Tamburris, Gordons and Reillys hosted viewing parties at their homes.

# COMMITTING TO RECOVERY

(continued from cover)

addiction-recovery support group three days a week and also does individual counseling at Catholic Charities.

## FINDING STRENGTH IN OTHERS

She credits MAT with helping her stay successful in recovery.

“I don’t have any cravings. This really works for me. Not everyone is the same way - they have to do what works for them,” she said. “But now, I feel really strong. The group counseling and one-on-one sessions at Catholic Charities also play a major role in my sobriety. Being in a supportive group of women who have been through similar situations and give each other strength makes me feel amazing about every step I’ve taken to continue my sobriety. We can discuss anything that bothers us, our triggers and ways we can prevent relapsing.”

Jim Keashon, Project Free’s supervisor, said another ingredient to the program’s success is its “whole-person” approach. Program staff assess all of a patient’s needs and strive to break down any barriers to treatment to ensure long-term stability. That’s why Project Free and other Catholic Charities addiction recovery programs provide transportation and childcare if needed. The programs also have bilingual staff and serve people regardless of whether they have health insurance.

Britney’s fiancé also is in recovery, and both see their baby as a blessing sure to keep them firmly on the road to recovery.

“I wake up to my son every morning. He’s such a motivator for me,” Britney said. “My recovery is number 1, along with raising him. We’re a family now, and we have to look out not just for us, but for our son. I see great things ahead now. I never want to go back to my rough road of using, because I know my son needs his mother, and I want to watch him grow into the amazing man I know he will be one day.”

**FOR INFORMATION** on Project Free, call program Supervisor Jim Keashon at (609) 396-4557, ext. 2437.

# FINDING THE CONFIDENCE

## To Be on Her Own

Kelly Miller works with people coming out of prison, helping them find housing, jobs and whatever else they need to reintegrate successfully into society. She knows how hard it can be to find affordable housing. And because she works for a social services nonprofit, she can fully empathize with the challenge of trying to pay rent when you work a low-wage job in one of the most expensive states in the nation. So when she learned about Rapid Re-Housing a few months ago, she realized it was a program she desperately needed herself.

“It’s a humbling situation, because I’m in a helping profession, and here I am asking for help myself,” Kelly said. “My clients are telling me: ‘I need housing.’ Well, so do I.”

Rapid Re-Housing is a nationally recognized “Housing First” model that’s intended to help people get housing quickly, become self-sufficient and stay housed. It provides short-term rental assistance and services, funding a renter’s security deposit and first month’s rent, and 70 percent of the second and third months’ rent. At the same time, it requires clients to put that 70 percent into a bank account, as a way to build savings. Staff meanwhile teach clients budgeting strategies and provide food and furniture assistance as needed. After three months, staff can extend support, if needed, to ensure housing stability.

Catholic Charities for years has offered Rapid Re-Housing services in Burlington and Mercer County. This year, the agency received state funding to expand Rapid Re-Housing to Ocean County.

Kelly and her 11-year-old son needed housing in a hurry after a family dispute left her homeless in late spring.

Kristine Bodnar, a Catholic Charities housing specialist, was a bit worried when she first heard from Kelly.

“We literally had about five days to get Kelly housed,” she said. “And there are a lot of different housing issues that COVID created.”

## PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

The federal and state eviction moratoriums put in place early in the pandemic meant that there was little movement in housing, with few vacancies opening up, Bodnar said. While that protected financially stressed





▲ Kelly Miller found an apartment through our Rapid Re-Housing program, with the assistance of housing specialist Kristine Bodnar.

renters facing eviction, it meant apartment-hunters had a tougher time finding available rentals.

In addition, many rental offices closed during the lockdown - and some remain closed. "So even being able to get a hold of landlords right now is difficult," Bodnar said.

At the same time, authorities have reported increased rental scams during the pandemic. Scammers lurk in online classifieds like Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace, offering too-good-to-be-true rents to renters whose desperation outweighs their judgment.

In fact, Kelly said she almost fell prey to such a scam before she connected with Catholic Charities.

"They said 'Oh we're not doing walk-throughs but you can PayPal me the deposit and we'll mail you the key,'" she said.

But Kelly got lucky and found an available, affordable unit in the Browns Woods Apartments. This is the first time she's lived on her own and been fully responsible for supporting herself.

"I'm definitely paying more attention to my spending, because before, I was just blowing money like I was rich or something," she said with a rueful smile.

Her son loves their new home, where kids his age frequently pound on the door to persuade him to go out and play.

"Thankfully I was able to get help from this program, because otherwise, I probably would have been in a shelter. This has definitely been a reality check and helped me realize I have to be more responsible, not only as an adult, but as a parent too, to make sure my son has food and everything he needs," Kelly said. "I honestly wouldn't have ever pictured me in my own place like this. It has really helped with my confidence, being on my own."

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**FOR INFORMATION** about Rapid Re-Housing, contact program Supervisors Mosudi Idowu or Kristine Bodnar at (856) 764-6940, ext. 6124.

# FINDING A JOB

## Brings Joy After Unemployment



For years, Wayne Eldridge couldn't get a job. Shop Rite, Sam's Club, Dollar General, Goodwill ... the list of places where he applied - and got rejected - goes on and on.

"Most wouldn't tell me why. Sometimes they would be honest - they'd say it was because of my background check," Wayne said, referring to criminal charges he faced three years ago after he fought with his mother while he was intoxicated.

After that incident, Wayne knew he needed to end his years-long struggle with alcoholism. So he reached out to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton and began recovery in Partial Care, an intensive outpatient program that also connects clients with mental health counseling and employment and housing services.

That's where he met Ann Marie Harrison, a job coach in Catholic Charities' Supported Employment program.

Supported Employment helps people who have a mental illness assess their aptitudes and abilities, set realistic goals and make informed choices regarding employment. Once a person gets a job, employment specialists like Harrison then act as a mentor and trainer, giving the employee on-the-job support to ensure their long-term career success.

Besides his criminal record, Wayne had other hurdles in his job hunt. He never finished high school or attended college. He spent a few years in a mental health institution and also struggled with homelessness.



▲ Ann Marie Harrison, a Supported Employment job coach, and Wayne Eldridge at Delaware House.

And he's now 60, an age where age discrimination factors into the likelihood of hiring success.

When the pandemic hit last spring, it seemed he might never land a job.

"Things shut down, and people weren't hiring," Harrison said. "Part of my job is to go out and develop relationships with employers - but you couldn't meet anyone in-person."

### A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Finally, in August, Wayne got some good news: Trinity Cleaning, a social enterprise program of Catholic Charities, wanted him. Now, Wayne works as a custodian at Delaware House in Westampton, where many of Catholic Charities' Burlington County behavioral health programs are based.

As part of his ongoing recovery, Wayne visits Delaware House once a week to attend a mental health support group. Since August, he's been a steadier presence there, as he cleans floors, tidies offices, keeps the windows sparkling and more. As long as it took Wayne to land work, Harrison never doubted he would be successful.

"Both of us refused to give up. And Wayne has always had a positive attitude - maybe there might have been an hour or two where he said: 'I'm never going to get a job.' But it never lasted," Harrison said.

Working, Wayne said, gives him a purpose and a positivity that brightens his days.

"This place gave me a chance," Wayne said of Catholic Charities. "When you're out of work, it's like you stagnate. Working makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I accomplished something at the end of the day and I'm useful. I feel great about how far I've come. I got my own place now, and I got a job. Once I can get to it, I'm going to night school."

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**FOR INFORMATION** about Supported Employment, contact program Supervisor Arlene Campbell at (609) 267-9339, ext 5113.



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# #GIVING TUESDAY

## What Is Giving Tuesday?

On December 1, 2020, our community will come together for 24 hours of unprecedented giving to support the amazing work of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton through #GivingTuesday. Just as Black Friday and Cyber Monday kick off the holiday buying season, Giving Tuesday kicks off the giving season, highlighting the true meaning of this time of year.

## Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton

- ✓ provides food and housing
- ✓ offers mental health services
- ✓ delivers telehealth services
- ✓ has free domestic violence services
- ✓ supports children and families
- ✓ helps 100,000 people annually
- ✓ serves all people regardless of faith
- ✓ nearly 90¢ of every \$1 goes to programs

**You can support us by donating to our #GivingTuesday campaign, sharing it on your Facebook and Twitter, and visiting us at [www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org](http://www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org).**