

PHOENIX RISING

New Business Helps Sustain Survivor of Domestic Abuse

Imagine a swarm of police cars surrounding your driveway, officers threatening you with arrest and then being given a mere 15 minutes to collect essentials before being locked out of your home. For Kelly, a mother of two and health care administrator, this exact scenario played out in March of 2021, at the height of the COVID pandemic. A domestic abuse survivor, Kelly recounts the exhausting battle to get back into her home; she also shares details about a new passion that has become a helping hand for others.

Kelly had been in a relationship with her abuser for a little over a year and the warning signs were becoming harder and harder to ignore. She endured physical violence, emotional abuse and financial control. Thinking back, Kelly said she didn't realize domestic violence happened to articulate, educated, strong women. "My bruised body and broken spirit showed me otherwise."

Through her career as a nursing home administrator, Kelly was a firm believer in procedures. "I knew rules were in place to keep people safe. Systems save lives." But the system she encountered as a domestic abuse survivor was flawed. "The police and courts treat domestic violence like it's a relationship problem. It's not. It's a criminal problem. I was assaulted," said Kelly. "I was battered and my abuser was treated like he was the victim." Kelly recalled one instance when the police were called to her home because her abuser had attacked and choked her. Even though there were witnesses, her abuser was not arrested that night because there were no visible marks on her neck.

VIDEOS HELPED IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

Kelly recalls her abuser raging at her and denying it later. The gas lighting left her with a cognitive disconnect. She said she couldn't be certain it was really happening. Then,



▲ Through BoHo Bites Kelly has combined her love of creating fresh, healthy food with helping others. She and her children have held fundraisers for cancer patients and Providence House with the food truck.

Kelly began recording her abuser. There, on her phone, was the proof she needed to realize the incidents did, in fact, happen. Later, Kelly was also able to present the videos in court as evidence. "Because New Jersey is a one-party consent state, I didn't need his permission to record him. I also think it acted as a little bit of a deterrent."

Thankfully, her Al-Anon sponsor encouraged Kelly to reach out to Providence House Domestic Violence Services for assistance. And she did. "Providence House has been the most supportive entity throughout this entire ordeal. At times, just having someone to listen to me made such a huge difference."

While Kelly was in the midst of planning an escape strategy, her abuser filed a temporary restraining order (TRO) against her. That's when she was forced to leave her home. Despite countering with a TRO of her own, Kelly found little relief from the court system. With nowhere else to go, she and her children moved in with her parents. While they were welcomed with open arms, Kelly's father was a cancer patient and she worked in a nursing home. The anxiety and fear that her presence in their home posed an increased risk to his health weighed on Kelly.



A Message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Dear Donor,

Welcome to our 110th year! As Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton marks this extraordinary milestone, a certain Psalm comes to mind; it is a psalm of praise and thanks. It says, for the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

We have been serving the most vulnerable members of the diocese since 1913 – through many generations. We have been called to the aid of our neighbors during times of war, the Great Depression, several recessions, natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

In the year ahead, we expect to serve more than 110,000 people. Record numbers of families are coming to us for housing assistance, food and clothing. More and more people are experiencing substance use disorders and

struggling with mental health issues. Last year, Providence House had to identify alternative locations for hundreds of domestic violence survivors because our safe houses were beyond capacity.

You may wonder – I know I sometimes do – how we continue to meet these growing needs. Strong faith, careful planning, and consistent support from friends like you are some of the reasons we have lasted all these years. Another key element is our team of dedicated professionals committed to carrying out our mission of restoring dignity and independence to those in need. Together, we always find a way.

In Gratitude,

Marlene Laó-Collins
Executive Director



Publisher: Jennifer Leip
Editor: Victoria Cranga
Writer: Hollis Painting
Designer: Miroslav Farina

383 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08618
(609) 394-5181

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



The Monmouth County Board
invites you to

**THURSDAY,
MAY 25, 2023**

**THE MOLLY
PITCHER INN**
88 Riverside Ave
Red Bank, NJ



www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/CtS2023

Board of Trustees

- Most Rev. David M. O'Connell, C.M.*
President, Bishop of Trenton
- J. George Reilly – Chair
- Michael W. Herbert – Vice Chair
- Marlene Laó-Collins – Secretary
- Josephine R. Esquivel
- Rev. Msgr. Thomas Gervasio*
- Natalie A. Ghaul
- Megan Gordon
- Martin R. Hernandez
- Dolores Kelley
- John J. Kuchinski
- Brenda L. Rascher*
- Christen Sachs
- Caroline R. Taylor
- John M. Tesoro
- Madelyn Tusay

PHOENIX RISING

New Business Helps Sustain Survivor of Domestic Abuse

(continued)

The TRO against her should have been resolved within seven to 10 days. Because of a backlog of cases due to the pandemic and procedural missteps, she and her children ended up homeless for five months. Kelly said as her case floundered, she encountered victim shaming at nearly every turn. To add insult to injury, her abuser and his family were living in her home, throwing parties. She saw images on social media of strangers in her children's rooms and other people wearing her clothes. "I know now it was part of God's plan to show me that material things didn't matter. It was my belief and trust in God, my spirit and motivation to succeed for my children that would change everything."

GETTING SUPPORT FROM A WORTHY RESOURCE

During the ordeal, Kelly knew she could count on Providence House for support. Frequently she spoke with legal advocates before or after meetings with her attorney or hearings. "The people at Providence House did a lot of handholding. They always said, 'You can call us anytime.' They reminded me a temporary shelter was available if I needed it," she said. "Providence House provides really good resources for survivors."

As embarrassing as Kelly's nightmare was, she revealed details on social media. "I shared my story to keep myself safe. He knows people are watching." For Kelly, the shame and humiliation were overwhelming, but to see the effects things were having on her children, daughter aged 16 and son who was 10, was truly devastating. During this period, Kelly noticed her daughter, a junior in high school, becoming withdrawn and depressed. "I knew I had to do something to lift her up," said Kelly. A friend with an inactive food truck provided the answer. Kelly bought a broken-down hamburger truck and made it her own.

"My kids and I rebranded it BoHo Bites. It started as something fun to dream about. We came up with menus and invented lavender lemonade..." Somehow, the pieces all came together. The truck's design is light and bright; it features pastels and peace signs. Kelly and her kids came up with the idea of serving clean, coastal cuisine. She taught herself to drive the truck by watching YouTube videos. BoHo Bites is a crowd pleaser at fairs and festivals along the Jersey shore.

With the truck, Kelly and her children have held fundraisers for people with cancer, including "Rylee's Battle" and



▲ After months of being homeless, Kelly emerged from a domestic abuse nightmare with a renewed sense of purpose and a new career path.

"David's Dream and Believe." They have also become a Partner in Peace, raising money to support Providence House. Kelly held an Employee Appreciation event at Providence House and served a healthy and delicious lunch to everyone there to show her gratitude. "God took all the broken pieces of my life and wove them in a beautiful tapestry of healing, hope and prosperity to share with others."

Laura McCoy is the Legal Program Supervisor at Providence House. As a legal advocate, she talked with Kelly many times while she was fighting to get back into her home. Laura helped her prepare for court dates and appointments with her lawyer. She was also there when BoHo Bites rolled up to treat Providence House to lunch. "We see people when they're in crisis. We don't often get a chance to see the Phoenix rising, the beautiful lives they lead as survivors." Laura said she was so happy for Kelly and her children and believes her story will provide hope to others who are struggling.

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

NEW EISS CLINIC

Provides Walk-in Access to Mental Health Care

Expanding its Early Intervention Support Services (EISS) program for individuals experiencing mental health crises, Catholic Charities is helping stem the number of suicide deaths in New Jersey. Last December, Department of Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman cut the bright blue ribbon, marking the official opening of the clinic in Burlington County.

“EISS is a psychiatric urgent care clinic, providing rapid access to mental health interventions and co-occurring treatment for those in mental health crisis or with substance use disorder treatment needs,” said Associate Executive Director of Operations Susan Loughery. “People need a place where they can receive immediate triage for the symptoms of depression and rapid access to treatment.”

REMOVING BARRIERS TO CARE

The walk-in clinic is staffed with licensed clinicians, psychiatrists, nurse clinicians and peer community health workers. “Someone who is looking for help can come in and meet with someone right away,” said Loughery. “They don’t need a referral; they don’t need an appointment and they don’t need insurance.”

Joe Rizzello is the Director of Behavioral Health and Addiction Services at Catholic Charities. “Nearly one in five adults in the country lives with some sort of mental illness. Fewer than half will seek any kind of treatment,” he said. “Our goal is to make access to crisis mental health services available to everyone. Our services are provided in a comfortable home-like atmosphere. We provide transportation and can connect a patient to resources and services within the community, including primary and specialty care, housing and social determinant of health supports. There are peer services and support groups available as well,” he said.

The program is the result of a commitment by the state’s Department of Human Services, Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services to ensure mental health services are available to everyone. “As a result of tremendous support from advocacy groups, the State Legislature and the Governor,” said Loughery, “we now have these critical life-saving mental health crisis services in all 21 counties.” She noted Catholic Charities



▲ Susan Loughery, Marlene Laó-Collins and a host of team members gathered to watch as Department of Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman officially opens the Early Intervention Support Services clinic in Burlington County.

received one of the first EISS contracts from the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services in 2014 when they opened a clinic in Mercer County.

A LONG HISTORY OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

“Providing services to individuals who face mental health and substance use issues is not new to us,” said Executive Director Marlene Laó-Collins. “In 1971, a visionary, Frank Helverson, found \$15,000 in funding and began a part-time program for men and women discharged from psychiatric hospitals. Sometimes, it only takes one person to stand up for people who are often overlooked or underserved,” she said.

“Fast forward to today and another visionary is in this space who has an eye on increasing access to mental health services,” continued Laó-Collins. “Susan and her dynamic team continue to honor Catholic Charities’ long history of service to vulnerable people who need support.”

The New EISS Clinic, located at 25 Ikea Drive, Westampton, is open seven days a week. New clients are seen on a walk-in basis from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, call (800) 360-7711.

FIX IT PROGRAM

Helps Keep Seniors Safe in Their Homes

Joan worked as a professional caregiver for many years and knows the power of a kind word or a warm smile. She said she's the type of person who strikes up a conversation with a stranger in ShopRite. And that's how she learned about the Fix It Program that helps Ocean County seniors with minor home repairs and yard clean-ups.

"I was talking to this woman about the things I need to do around the house, and she said, 'You should get in touch with Catholic Charities.' She gave me the number, and I thought, what the heck, I'll call."

Joan admits she was a little apprehensive about the idea of letting someone she didn't know into her home. But after a chat with Community Services Program Director Nick Koumarianos, who explained that the volunteers who do the work are carefully vetted with background checks, she was ready.

Soon after, volunteer Ken arrived at her home and changed the batteries in her smoke detectors. "My husband used to take care of everything, but he died four years ago. And my children don't want me climbing up on a ladder." Next on Joan's list of chores for the Fix It volunteers is a grab bar in the bathroom.

"This is such a nice service. Everyone was so helpful and kind," said Joan.

"Obviously, there is a benefit to the physical well-being of the seniors we serve," said Koumarianos. "Our



▲ Joan appreciates knowing help is available for the chores that need tending to around her home and she'd like to tell everyone how wonderful the Fix It Program is!

volunteers ensure their homes are safe. But there is also a social component to the program that allows the seniors to meet new people and make a connection."

FOR INFORMATION on how to have the Fix It Program help around the house with repairs or maintenance, please contact Kristine Santana at (732) 363-5322 x3223.



We need volunteers to perform minor home repairs for seniors in Ocean County through our Fix It Program. This is a great opportunity to give back to your community.

Please contact Kristine Santana at (732) 363-5322 x3223

HEALTHIER, MORE TRAUMA-INFORMED SPACE Planned at Ocean County's Safe House

A spending bill approved by the U.S. Congress in the waning days of 2022 included Community Development Funds to renovate Providence House Domestic Violence Service's Ocean County safe house. Congressman Chris Smith, representing New Jersey's 4th District, requested and received \$750,000 to address the reduced capacity at the safe house because of pandemic social distancing protocols.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ocean County safe house could accommodate 27 individuals in communal, dormitory-style rooms. Safety procedures put in place during the pandemic reduced the house's capacity and Providence House staff needed to find alternative safe locations for survivors. Additionally, the pandemic saw a dramatic increase in the number of individuals and families fleeing domestic abuse.

"Our hearts are full at Providence House today," said Mary Pettrow, Service Area Director for Children and Family Services at Catholic Charities. "Receiving this funding is nothing short of a miracle. In 2022, we provided more than 17,800 nights of shelter in Ocean County and continue to work to overcome the challenges that the pandemic and increased demand for domestic violence services present."

Last year, Representative Smith visited Providence House and toured the safe house facility. He met with Executive Director Marlene Laó-Collins, Associate Executive Director of Operations Susan Loughery, Director of Children and Family Services Mary Pettrow and Providence House Program Director Danielle Meyer. They discussed the added logistical difficulties presented by providing services to more than 100 survivors in separate safe locations.

"The impact of this funding will have a strong, direct effect on the lives of survivors in our community," said Pettrow. "It will allow for a major renovation of the Safe House facility. Interior bedrooms will be reconfigured



▲ U.S. Congressman Chris Smith secured federal funding to renovate Providence House's safe house in Ocean County. Last year, Smith toured the facility. Shown are (from left): Susan Loughery, Mary Pettrow, Congressman Smith and Marlene Laó-Collins.

so they can function as single unit or a combined unit for families. In addition to creating flexibility, this new configuration is a more trauma-informed model that will go a long way in addressing not only public health concerns, but also emotional safety."

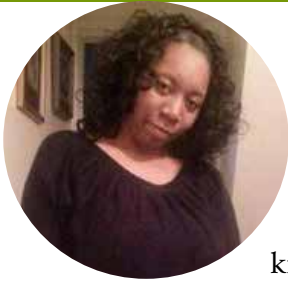
"Over the years we've learned Congressman Smith is judicious spending taxpayers' dollars and he has a deep compassion for the most vulnerable in our communities," said Laó-Collins. "For these reasons we are humbled and honored he selected Catholic Charities' Providence House Safe House project. We will be better able to meet the needs of families facing domestic abuse and will deliver positive outcomes well into the future."

Providence House provides a wide range of services for survivors of domestic abuse, including individual counseling and support groups, counseling for children, legal advocacy and safe houses.

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

SUPPORT FROM PEERS

Is the Key to Partners in Recovery



When Janae’s grandmother and uncle died within two weeks of one another, her grief was too much to handle. With a three-year-old son to care for, she knew she needed help.

“I was feeling depressed and it was a horrible experience,” she recalled. “I couldn’t stop crying. I couldn’t eat without throwing up.” She attended crisis counseling at the time and thankfully, her counselor referred her to the Partners in Recovery (PIR) program. PIR offers a wide range of rehabilitation groups and activities for adults experiencing mental illness who need a more intensive environment. Janae attended group therapy sessions at PIR for three years.

Janae said at first, she was hesitant to open up during therapy sessions. She preferred to listen to the experiences of others. She also noticed how helpful the people in the group were. “It was like they said, ‘I see someone going through something. Let me help them out.’”

SUPPORT FROM PEERS REALLY WORKS

“There were so many positive people at Partners,” she said. “The other people in the program were very

supportive. It was like you had a family of friends to help guide you.” Janae said her peers encouraged her to attend college. “They pushed me to do positive things. It wasn’t like they were pressuring me. They helped me realize I could do more.”

Today, Janae is a supervisor at her job. She enjoys performing as part of a Praise Dance troupe at New Generation Pentecostal of Praise Church. Janae has also written several books and currently has five titles on Amazon, including a book of poetry. She said she is grateful for the help she received from PIR.

Not too long ago, Medication Assisted Treatment Coordinator Wilson Bagley organized an alumni day for the participants in the PIR program. He invited Janae back to speak with people who are new to the program. “I told them if they used this program in the right way, it can be very beneficial,” said Janae. “Don’t be stuck. Use PIR as a steppingstone and continue to do what you need to do.”

.....
FOR INFORMATION on the Partners in Recovery Program, call (609) 396-4557.

Catholic Charities
DIOCESE OF TRENTON
2023

Guardian Angel Dinner Dance

Aged to Perfection
Est. 1989

THE MERION
1301 US-130
Cinnaminson, NJ

**THURSDAY,
SEPTEMBER 21**

www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/GADD2023



383 West State Street
PO Box 1423
Trenton, NJ 08607-1423

\$5,070,000 raised to date



Capital Campaign Expands Vital Services

In one way or another, we have all seen someone who is hungry, homeless, a victim of domestic abuse or suffering with behavioral health or addiction issues. Now more than ever, people need our help.

So far, funds raised through our **Restoring Dignity, Giving Hope** Campaign have been used to expand our domestic violence services – an increase in cases has forced us to house survivors in motels because our safe houses are full. We have augmented our immigration services to include family counseling and employment assistance to make sure the hard-working people who come to us can thrive in a community they call home. Additionally, we will relocate our Ocean County food pantry to a larger facility to serve the growing number of food insecure families.



We hope to meet our \$10 million goal and ensure the most vulnerable among us always have what they need.

www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/restore