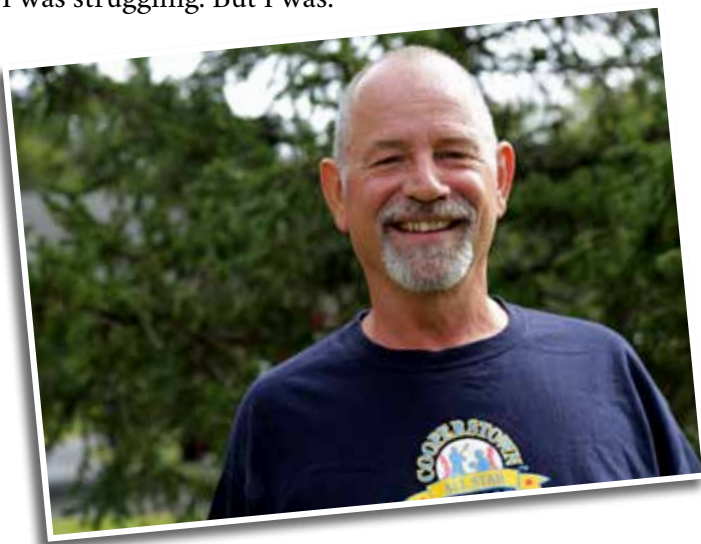


SEIZING A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

And Thanking God for Each New Day

Chris first tried drugs when he was 15. Marijuana gave way to harder drugs, and occasional dabbling grew into daily use. There were a few wake-up calls – like when he sold his car for money to buy cocaine or when he had to defend himself in a knife fight on his way to buy drugs. But he slept through them.

“I thought it was just normal, hedonistic living,” Chris said. “I didn’t heed any of the red flags then. I didn’t think I was struggling. But I was.”



In August 2009, a wake-up call came that was too loud to ignore. After he received a \$10,000 payout in a fraud case, some “friends” beat him badly, stole the money, and left him for dead.

“I woke up in the hospital and just thought how God gave me a second chance,” he said. “I could have died - and many addicts do die. I was relieved of any desire to use again.”

Chris left his neighborhood, partner, and friends behind for good. He hasn’t touched drugs since – but learned in therapy that his addiction masked undiagnosed mental illness.



▲ Chris umpires youth baseball.

“I was self-medicating to feel better. But all drugs did was delay the crash of my depression and suicidal tendencies,” Chris said.

In 2015, Chris reached out to Delaware House in Westampton, where people struggling with addiction and mental illness can recover in individual and group therapy, get employment assistance, and participate in other activities with the goal of independent living. There, staffers like counselor Teresa Stroud taught him coping skills. He learned how his childhood trauma, which included being raised by a father with an explosive temper, echoed into his adulthood. He now visits Delaware House three times a week, finding strength and solidarity in group counseling.



A Message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

As winter approaches, darkness sets in, and winter's icy grip takes hold. Winter can be harsh and unforgiving, sometimes forcing us to change our well-thought-out, important plans. It can thrust us into unexpected hazardous situations, like driving through a blinding snow storm. These conditions can make what is familiar – a drive home from work – stressful, scary, and unpredictable. If you've lived in New Jersey for any amount of time, these are experiences we've all shared and can tell stories about. The good news - it is temporary! Spring is coming.

Winter can be a metaphor for the experiences of the people who come to us who are facing homelessness, domestic violence, mental illness or addiction, and feelings of isolation and fearfulness because of their immigration status. We are their

Spring! We are their sign of hope. Through your generosity, and the grace of God, we have and will continue to light a pathway for them to realize the fullness of what they were intended to be.

In the coming months, there will be ample opportunity for celebrations where we will be surrounded by our families in the warmth and comfort of our homes. Let us give praise and thanksgiving for those blessings. May the realization of our blessings put our hearts on fire to be generous givers to help our neighbors in need.

Warmly,

**Marlene Laó-Collins,
Executive Director**



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

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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.

A Tasty Silver Anniversary Benefits Providence House

Over 400 people attended the 25th annual Taste of Burlington County, raising more than \$60,000 to benefit Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton's Providence House Domestic Violence Services.

The event was held Oct. 9 at The Merion in Cinnaminson. It featured samplings from more than 20 local restaurants, a gift auction, and raffle drawings.

Money raised will support counseling for adults and children, education and legal advocacy, a 24/7 hotline, sheltering, and specialized children's services at Providence House in Burlington County, a pillar in the community with over 40 years of service.

FOR INFORMATION about Providence House of Burlington County, call Barbara J. Katz, community affairs coordinator, at (856) 824-0599, ext. 8622.

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MAKING A BEAUTIFUL TRANSFORMATION

After the Trauma of Domestic Violence

When most people think of domestic violence, they tend to imagine blood, bruises, and broken bones. After all, those are the cases likelier to make the headlines.

But for Sydney, her marriage was a nightmare that left no physical scars. Her husband was a “narcissistic psychopath,” she said, whose unpredictable, explosive outbursts and violent verbal abuse made their home feel hazardous.

“My sister was very protective and sometimes would stay with us. He would always make me go outside to talk to him, because he didn’t want her to hear how horribly he talked to me,” she remembered.

Last year, a military deployment took her away from her husband, and the separation helped her realize she could not return home. When the deployment ended, Sydney went to a safe house in North Jersey. From there, she reached out to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton’s Providence House Domestic Violence Services in Burlington County for help.

At Providence House, she participated in an eight-week program where she learned that the alienation she felt in her marriage was a common control tactic abusers use to prevent their partners from reaching out for help. She also shed her bad feelings about the many times she tried to leave her eight-year marriage, learning it typically takes seven attempts for someone to successfully escape an abusive relationship. And Providence House staff taught her to spot red flags in a partner’s behavior to ensure she doesn’t fall into other abusive relationships.

FINDING STRENGTH IN OTHERS

Sydney now attends a weekly support group at Providence House, drawing strength from other women in recovery. She especially loves the art projects there and self-care activities like manicures, facials, and yoga that volunteers provide on “spa days.”

All of Providence House’s services are free and confidential.

“Talking to other women was especially helpful for me,” Sydney said. “Sometimes you can’t believe other people had it worse than you until you hear their stories.”

► Michele Fesler,
supervisor at
Providence
House’s
Burlington
County
Counseling Center



Sydney is now divorced. She applied for a restraining order – but gave up the effort when she learned victims must face their accusers in court. So she moved onto a military base so that her ex can’t find or harass her.

While she feels stronger every day, her finances will be slower to recover: Her ex accrued debts when they were together. With their finances mingled, his debts became her debts, which she now must pay off.

DEFINING HER OWN SELF

“Financial abuse is common and not something typically identified with domestic violence,” said Michele Fesler, supervisor at Providence House’s Burlington County Counseling Center. “But financial abuse can infiltrate your life, ruin your credit score, and force you to spend years climbing out of debt. It’s another barrier for women trying to leave an abusive relationship.”

Sydney’s emotions remain raw from trauma that’s not far enough in her rear-view mirror. Still, sharing her story gives her strength.

“I don’t want people to think I’m the person he made me,” she said, remembering the withdrawn, “miserable” person she became in her marriage. “I want to be me. I will not allow anyone else to define me besides me.”

She plans to get a butterfly tattoo, a permanent reminder of the powerful transformation she made this year.

“When a butterfly comes out of a cocoon, it is beautiful and adventurous and free,” Sydney said. “Like me.”

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

SEIZING A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

(continued from cover)

“There’s no doubt that Catholic Charities played a gigantic role in saving my life,” Chris said. “I was in desperate danger of committing suicide. I learned it’s OK to have help. You can learn how to cope with day-to-day living. I want people to believe in the system, because it works.”

SMALL GOALS, BIG RESULTS

Most importantly, he learned that recovery requires ongoing work and commitment.

“It’s a manner of living that demands rigorous honesty and your attention,” he said. “I am confident but not complacent. I’ve been working on myself for 10 years – and I still am. I just forgave my father the other day.”

In treatment, Chris rediscovered his interest in old hobbies, like bowling. He’s also rekindling his life’s passion – umpiring baseball, which he first began doing at summer camp when he was 10 years old.

“They needed an umpire, so I stepped up – and I loved it. It was like cupid shot me. I was half-decent at it, so I did it the rest of the summer. And now, I’ve been putting a mask over this face since 1972,” said Chris, who even worked a brief stint as a professional umpire in Minor League Baseball.

He doesn’t know what the future holds. He sets small, short-range goals for himself, as he learned to do during his recovery.

“When I think of my addiction, I think of making it to midnight without drugs. When I’m sad or suicidal, I think: Let me get through today. It’s like weight loss – if you have to lose 50 pounds, first lose 5 pounds,” he said. “When you set small, short, doable goals, you can achieve them. This has blossomed into 10 years of recovery.”

He added: “I am so grateful to be alive and out of the cinderblock cell of depression that I’ve got to pinch myself every 10 seconds. I’m living one day at a time. Every morning, I thank God for a new day.”

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FOR INFORMATION about Delaware House, call Partial Care Supervisor Kelli Madison at (609) 267-9339, ext. 5133.

STRIVING FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

Marina and Jose Aguilar know well the stereotypes that can cling to the immigrant community.

That they flout federal laws and come here illegally. That they commit crimes and overwhelm public assistance programs. That they don’t pay taxes.

For the Aguilars, the antidote to such assumptions is to live life well.

“We have gotten nothing for free – everything we have we worked really hard for. We pay our taxes on time,” Marina said. “Literally, what some people say doesn’t make sense. I pay it no mind, because I know I’m not doing that. I’m not committing crimes. I’m just trying to make my life better so my kids’ lives can be easier.”

Jose agreed: “People say: ‘you want to become a citizen to get benefits.’ But no – I never got benefits before, why would I start now?”

Marina was 16 in 2009 when she arrived in the United States from Colombia as a legal permanent resident (with a green card sponsored by her grandmother). She met Jose in Lakewood and soon welcomed baby Helen, who’s now 6, and later Mariana, 2. Jose was just a year older than Helen is now when his parents brought him, without papers, across the U.S.-Mexico border in search of better opportunities.

Lisha Loo-Morgan, Parish Services coordinator for Catholic Charities, helped Jose apply to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which helps undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children defer deportation actions and become eligible for work permits. Marina hoped to become a citizen, but then someone stole her car, with her green card inside.

The couple reached out to an immigration attorney for help – only to be told that the bill for getting her a new card would top \$10,000. So the couple returned to Loo-Morgan, who helped Marina navigate the complicated bureaucracy to get a new card and in 2015, become a naturalized citizen. Marina, in turn, petitioned for her husband, who met the immigration requirements under immigration law, to get his green card too.



▲ Jose and Marina Aguilar with their children, Helen and Mariana

AN ANGEL AT WORK

Jose, a legal permanent resident, now is working with Loo-Morgan on paperwork for his citizenship.

“We went to Catholic Charities to apply for my DACA and met Lisha, and ever since then, she has been an angel to us,” Jose said, adding that Loo-Morgan also persuaded him to pursue his high school degree after he dropped out.

Their immigration and citizenship issues complicated everything from big purchases like a car and home to Marina’s plans to pursue higher education to Jose’s efforts to start his own drywalling company.

But the couple does whatever it takes to succeed. Marina, a trained phlebotomist, dreams of a career in nursing, so she recently took a new housekeeping job at a hospital, primarily because her new employer will help pay for her schooling.

The couple recently bought their first house, and in the process, Jose grew so well-versed in real estate financing that he plans to expand his business to handle

that too. With each new accomplishment, Jose has never lost sight of his most important goal.

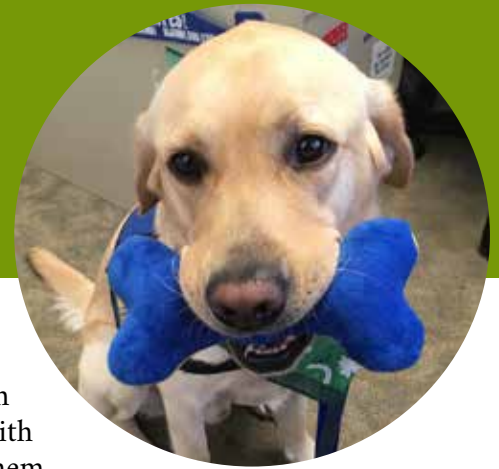
“I really want to become a citizen. Even without papers, I feel like I belong here. I grew up here. I met my wife here, I had my kids here, I bought my house here,” Jose said. “I really love this country, because this country gave me everything I have. This is my home.”

Loo-Morgan said she knew from the start that Jose, while troubled as a teenager, “was determined to get ahead and to do it right.”

“I’m proud of both of them for their accomplishments,” Loo-Morgan said. “They’ve come a long way and now have a beautiful family. I will always be there for them.”

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FOR INFORMATION about Parish Services, call program Coordinator Lisha Loo-Morgan at (732) 363-5322, ext. 3237.

A FURRY FRIEND to Comfort Kids in Crisis



The Family Growth Program in Red Bank has gone to the dogs. Literally.

A yellow labrador retriever named Surf began working there as a facility dog this summer, comforting children and adults who have experienced trauma or abuse and helping them to recover.

Canine Companions for Independence, the California-based nonprofit that gave Surf to Catholic Charities, specially trained him to be calm and non-reactive. The peaceful pup knows more than 40 commands that Melissa Boege, his handler and a Family Growth program supervisor, uses in games and activities during therapy.

“The response has been very positive,” Boege said. “We have gotten referrals from families who specify that they want their child to work with Surf. Surf’s skills not only help him to play games with the kids to teach coping skills and other strategies, but his calm demeanor and sweetness help the kids open up. I’ve had kids I’ve worked with for a long time talk very openly about topics that they had never brought up in therapy before, so much so that the kids sometimes even seem

surprised at how much they talk when Surf is there to sit with them and comfort them. It’s very healing.”



▲ Surf and Melissa Boege, his handler

In October, Boege and Surf started visiting Monmouth County schools to present “Safety Steps” abuse-prevention workshops to students in kindergarten through second grade.

“The students love interacting with Surf, especially shaking his paw and patting his head,” Boege said.

A 5-year-old girl told Boege: “I like when we take a walk with Surfie. He makes me feel happy.”

And a 14-year-old girl said: “I like how he sits next to me. He’s calming. He just listens. He’s a good talking buddy. And I have a dog like him at home so it makes it feel homey.”

Staff at the Red Bank office also love having a furry coworker around.

“He brightens our office,” Boege said. “Our staff members love when Surf greets them in the mornings. We have a lot of fun with our buddy.”



FOR INFORMATION about Surf and the Family Growth Program in Monmouth County, call program Supervisor Melissa Boege at (732) 747-9660, ext. 7101.

OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL DINNER DANCE Celebrates 30 Years

What better way to mark the 30th anniversary of our Guardian Angel Dinner Dance than by breaking records?! We raised more than \$325,000 – the most ever – during our signature fundraiser this year, money that will support our efforts to transform the lives of our neighbors in need in Central Jersey.

Nearly 400 people attended the glamorous gala on Sept. 21 at the Hyatt Regency Princeton, where we also honored a very successful client named Jordan, alongside some of our most loyal and ardent supporters. Honorees included Marianne Earle (Humanitarian Award); The Bank of Princeton (Corporate Citizen of the Year); Jesse DeSanto (Burlington Light of Hope); Francis Taylor (Mercer Light of Hope); Stanley Koreyva Jr. (Monmouth Light of Hope); and Joseph Leone Introna (Ocean Light of Hope).

Thanks to all our generous donors who make our life-saving work possible. Enjoy these photos from the wonderful evening.



▲ (top from left to right) Most Rev. David M. O’Connell, Bishop of Trenton; Vito Nardelli, Catholic Charities Board of Trustees chair, Marlene Laó-Collins, executive director of Catholic Charities; Megan and Jeffrey Gordon, co-chairs of the Guardian Angel Dinner Dance committee.

(bottom from left to right) Jesse DeSanto, Joseph Leone Introna, Richard Gillespie (The Bank of Princeton), Marianne Earle, Jordan, Edward Dietzler (The Bank of Princeton), Stanley Koreyva Jr., and Francis Taylor.

TO LEARN MORE about the Guardian Angel Dinner Dance, call Barbara Yuson, events and volunteer coordinator, at (609) 394-5181, ext. 1159.

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#GIVING TUESDAY

What Is Giving Tuesday?

On December 3, 2019, 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
- ✓ has 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.