





CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org F 🔚 🗹 💿

# A Long Walk Recovery an Ongoing Journey

Robert Brooks at Catholic Charities Early Intervention Support Services (EISS) (see full story on page 3)



### from the BISHOP OF TRENTON



Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and because of the crisis it occasioned,

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton has continued to provide services with adjustments to accommodate social distancing and protective gear to safeguard our staff who still came to work. I am truly grateful for their service to our brothers and sisters in need throughout the Diocese in the face of such an insidious enemy.

Be assured that all our staff members as well as those whom they served have been in my prayers

daily and will continue to be. And, in the face of this pandemic and the financial challenges it has created, you, our supporters, have continued to give generously. I thank God for all of you and have also kept you in my daily prayers.

May God bless you, Catholic Charities and all those we serve!

Respectfully yours in the Lord,

fausthe Commell Com

Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M., J.C.D.



## from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Last year, thanks to support from donors like you, we continued to build on our innovative programs that help people struggling with hunger, homelessness, mental illness,

addiction, domestic violence, and other hardships. We set many people on the path to recovery and long-term stability - children, senior citizens, and all ages in between; military veterans; pregnant women; immigrants; and others. Our 2020 strategic plan looked promising, and we were confident we would build on our good work.

Then the coronavirus pandemic hit, and the world changed. While it's frightening to face an invisible enemy, we are an essential service organization with more than 100 years of experience in disaster response, and we immediately ramped up our efforts. In troubled times, people rely on us more than ever. That demands we find the courage and wherewithal to act decisively. We remain fully operational, but in different ways to ensure the safety of our clients and staff. We expanded our telehealth and mental health access. We are welcoming more people to our food pantries. We are assisting more families at risk of losing their homes. We visit (while social distancing) our clients sheltering at home to ensure they continue receiving critical services. The list goes on.

We can't do this alone; we count on our supporters to give us a hand. That's why we immediately set up a Coronavirus Crisis Fund to raise the resources needed to support a community suddenly reeling from this unprecedented crisis. Indeed, the response was overwhelming - clearly, people want to help.

We are people of hope and resilience. Our frontline workers are unsung heroes doing God's work every day. They have my deepest admiration - as do you, our supporters. We can't do this without you.

God bless you, and stay well.

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Marlene Laó-Collins Executive Director

## **INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

A Long Walk: Recovery an Ongoing Journey	3
Coronavirus Demands Creativity for this Essential Social Services Agency	4
Using Technology to Transform Lives	6
An Adoptee's Long Search Brings the Joy of New Family	8
2019 Annual Report: Revenue and Expenses	10
2019 Annual Report: Donor Listing	11

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

# A LONG WALK: Recovery an Ongoing Journey

Robert Brooks spoke about affordable housing at a 2018 Congressional Reception.

Poverty and circumstance turned Robert Brooks into a law-breaker at the tender age of 9. With an absentee father, an abusive, mentally ill mother, and three younger brothers, Robert remembers all too well the desperation that drove him to steal food to feed his family and the shame that made him shoplift clothes to end the derision of classmates. As a teenager and young man, selling drugs seemed the only reliable way to keep money in his pockets. His downward spiral deepened when he sampled the drugs and became addicted.

It didn't take long for the law to catch up to him. For decades, Robert cycled from prison to the streets, and back again. By 2015, he was 50 years old - and locked up again.

"One of the corrections officers asked me what I was doing there. I couldn't answer that question," Robert said. "I was always winding up in prison and not really knowing why."

Therapy helped him find answers. He talked about his

traumatic childhood in counseling, where he was soon diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The diagnosis was an epiphany - and a springboard to long-term recovery. When he told a therapist that he wanted to help others avoid his troubled path, she implored him to first help himself.

That involved reaching out to Catholic Charities, where he began his addiction recovery and continued counseling through the Partial Care Program. The intensive outpatient program offers addiction treatment, mental health services, and added benefits like employment and housing assistance.

#### WRITING AS THERAPY

An explosive encounter on a Trenton street in 2017 was also a turning point. A man threatened him with a baseball bat.

"Instead of reacting, I was proactive - I didn't do anything. I walked away - and it was a long walk, too," said Robert, who felt driven by the encounter to publish a memoir he'd written behind bars. Robert had always been an avid reader of self-help books. But he found that chronicling his own turbulent life proved to be the best self-help. His self-published book, called "Psychology of a Thug: Demystify," is a raw retelling of everything he's survived, from being molested and shot twice to becoming a teenage father and losing himself for years in addiction and crime sprees.

"I got sick and tired of being sick and tired," Robert said.

In 2018, he became a peer mental health advocate at Catholic Charities' Early Intervention Support Services (EISS), a walk-up mental health program in Mercer County for people who need immediate mental health help.

Robert knows his past struggles offer lessons and inspiration for others on his same journey. Indeed, he goes by the nickname "the Thug Doctor," and works to destigmatize mental illness in hopes of inspiring people, particularly in underserved urban areas, to get help.



## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

# 3,203

People served through our counseling/ mental health-focused programs

## 625

Individuals received addictionfocused treatment

5,437 Hours of pre- and post-employment-related services provided

**348** People served through housing services

## A Long Walk: Recovery an Ongoing Journey (continued)

That was partly what drove Danica Rivello, director of Outpatient and Crisis Services, to hire Robert two years ago.

"Robert has been a huge asset to EISS, as he is able to meet the client where they are at, empathize with their experiences, and share with clients that anything is within arm's reach with the right mindset," Rivello said. "Robert is a team player and always willing to help his colleagues - no task is too big or too small for him. Robert also brings to the position his sense of humor, which is very necessary in a crisis-driven program. He's able to bring calm to challenging situations."

#### **MANY MORE STEPS**

Robert now attends Camden County Community College, where he's close to becoming a certified alcohol and drug counselor. Once he has an associate's degree in hand, he plans to pursue bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, with an eye on becoming a clinician. The road to recovery isn't easy: Robert's brother died shortly after he published his book, and he lost his grandson to gang violence in Trenton in 2019.

"I contemplated giving up both times, but I know my brother and my grandson wouldn't want me to do that," Robert said. "So I powered through."

Recovery, he added, is an ongoing journey with the destination always still ahead.

"I'm not where I want to be, but where I'm supposed to be," he said. "I came a long way. But I remain humble. I'm careful because I want to remain on a positive path and not get sidetracked. School is another step on my journey. Hopefully there will be many more steps."

**FOR INFORMATION** about Catholic Charities' Early Intervention Support Services (EISS), call Danica Rivello, director of Outpatient and Crisis Services, at (609) 256-4200.

# **CORONAVIRUS DEMANDS CREATIVITY**

In more than 100 years of service, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton has weathered an untold number of catastrophes and disasters. So when the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed the world earlier this year, Catholic Charities did what it does best it sprang into action to help people in crisis.

As social services providers, Catholic Charities staff are considered essential workers. The quarantine and social-distancing mandates required some creative thinking and fast action to ensure that Catholic Charities could continue serving existing clients, while reaching out to newcomers in need.

For many programs, that involved a shift to telemental health, with staff providing support groups, counseling, case management and more via telephone or computer. Staff in some programs began making house calls. For example, social workers in the Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), which helps people with persistent, serious mental illness live independently, delivered medications and other services to clients at home, rather than bringing them in to program sites for support groups and social events.

# EXPERIENCED IN DISASTER RECOVERY

But for others, recovery cannot be a remote undertaking. In-person services had to continue - with heightened universal precautions for thousands of people in need:

- Catholic Charities has 17 behavioral health group homes, two safe-house shelters for women and children in domestic crisis, and one group home for boys and young men who have aged out of foster care. All remain operational through the pandemic.
- Addiction treatment. Many people recovering from addiction get medication-assisted treatment, which requires in-person nursing care and monitoring.
- Food pantries. With a surging need, staff suspended normal

## for this Essential Social Services Agency



▲ Netta Mack, licensed practical nurse at Catholic Charities' Intensive Residential Program-South, covered head to toe in protective gear

rules, serving anyone who came to the food pantries without requiring identification or other paperwork. To protect clients and staff, visitors received prepacked grocery bags at the door. Community Services and Providence House Domestic Violence Services also made home deliveries and invited drive-up, curbside service to ensure people in need wouldn't go hungry.

• Crisis counseling. Calls increased, as coronavirus stresses led to

rising anxiety, depression and other mental health crises. Staff at programs including the Early Intervention Support Services and Crisis Intervention Support Services continued immediate, walk-in counseling in-person, with added precautions.

The increased demand for services also prompted Catholic Charities in April to create a Coronavirus Crisis Fund, which will enable the agency to continue helping people in need through the economic crisis that will linger long after the quarantine and stay-home orders end.

Catholic Charities was wellpositioned to respond to the coronavirus crisis, given its extensive experience in disaster crisis work, most recently with Superstorm Sandy, the 2008 recession, and 9/11, said Marlene Laó-Collins, executive director of Catholic Charities.

"Last year, as we developed our long-term strategic initiative, we could not have predicted the crisis we face today – widespread business and school closures and indefinite quarantines of the public, mandated by all levels of our government. Yet here we are," Laó-Collins said. "We, as an essential service, continue to operate. This agency is a beacon of light in the midst of this madness for those who truly need us."

FOR INFORMATION about our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit: www. catholiccharitiestrenton.org/ covid-19.

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## children and family services 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

# 1,169

Families received crisis intervention and stabilization services

## 1,328

Individuals received support, case management, and other services through El Centro

# 3,524

Children and adults received counseling and support services to help with trauma

# 793

Individuals were provided with immigration support and counseling services

## **498**

Individuals were provided with English as a Second Language (ESL) classes

# **USING TECHNOLOGY** to Transform Lives

So much of what Catholic Charities does is face-toface. From support groups and counseling to domestic violence education and addiction treatment, recovery for the thousands of people we help annually occurs in the interaction and encouragement they get from our staff in person.

So when the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent social distancing occurred, Catholic Charities made sure people in need would still get that face-toface support - with a little help from technology.

"Except for housing and food, we can offer most of our services via telehealth," said Lisa Lawson, director of Clinical and Integrated Health for Catholic Charities.

Telehealth is a catchword for services provided remotely in all sorts of non-contact ways, from FaceTime to conference calls to Zoom. So to comply with shelterin-place orders, support groups that met in person now commune on Zoom. Counselors talk and listen to clients in teleconferences. Case managers and care coordinators "meet" in cyberspace to make referrals. Staff gather online instead of in person. Video translation services and bilingual staff are available to break down any language barriers that arise.

#### **A SILVER LINING**

"It's really the future of the industry anyway," Lawson said. "We've been using telehealth in one way or another for several years now. So for us, pivoting during the coronavirus crisis was really more of expanding upon the work flows that already existed, and making sure they were able to accommodate the growing need for resources and the education for consumers. who maybe didn't know how to use telehealth. This was one of the challenges we met pretty quickly and successfully, helping consumers through questions like 'what is Zoom, and how do I use it?', 'do I need to download something?' and 'what if I don't have access to the Internet?'"



▲ Lisa Lawson (standing) with administrative assistant Nelly Wetzel (seated) at Catholic Charities' Family Access Center in East Windsor

Equipment was a challenge, though. Because many of the people Catholic Charities serves struggle financially, many don't have smartphones, computers, Wi-Fi access, or other things telehealth requires, Lawson said.

That's why Catholic Charities now is advocating for increased access to technology for underserved populations, especially people struggling with poverty and homelessness, she said. The agency also applied for funding to supply phones for clients without them, after the Federal Communications Commission announced a nationwide program to help healthcare providers purchase telecommunications, broadband connectivity, and devices necessary for providing telehealth services.

"The silver lining in this pandemic is that we're learning how useful technology really is, not just for our practitioners but also how quickly and efficiently we can deliver critical treatments to our consumers," Lawson said.

FOR INFORMATION contact Lisa Lawson, director of Clinical and Integrated Health at Catholic Charities, at llawson@cctrenton.org.

## **COMEDIAN JOE PISCOPO TO HOST VIRTUAL BENEFIT**

Comedian and actor Joe Piscopo will host Catholic Charities' inaugural Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope this fall, a virtual event that will replace four of our annual fundraisers.

After the coronavirus pandemic shut down our communities and turned public gatherings into a health risk, Catholic Charities decided to rethink how we raise the money we need to serve more than 100,000 people every year. That meant consolidating four annual fundraisers into a single, virtual event, in order to ensure the safety of our supporters and staff.



The Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope will be held online on Sept. 30th. The virtual celebration and fundraiser combines Catholic Charities' signature annual fundraiser, the Guardian Angel Dinner Dance, as well as the Monmouth Ray of Hope (supporting Monmouth County programs), the Taste of Burlington, and the Gift Auction (both supporting Catholic Charities' Providence House Domestic Violence Services in Burlington and Ocean counties). Altogether, the four events typically raise over half a million dollars and draw nearly 2,000 attendees.

Piscopo, a native New Jerseyan, Saturday Night Live alum and musician, will host the Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope. Piscopo is well-known for supporting the community through charitable works and appearances.

The benefit also will include other special guests, musical performances, a silent auction, a 50/50,



▲ Comedian and actor Joe Piscopo

awards for outstanding volunteers and supporters, and much more. Planning now is underway for this exciting event. Stay tuned for more details.

"Our supporters have always been our guardian angels - they really are the reason we are able to do the work we do," said Nancy Tompkins, director of Development and Marketing. "We are thrilled to have Joe Piscopo on board. And we are counting on our supporters now more than ever to ensure this new event is a success. People can watch from the comfort of their own homes, and we have some great surprises in store that will make this a can't-miss celebration!"

**FOR INFORMATION** about the Guardian Angel Benefit of Hope, contact Barbara Yuson, Events coordinator, at (609) 394-5181, ext. 1159, or byuson@cctrenton.org.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

53,622 Visits to our food pantries

**9,796** Visits for non-food essentials, such as clothing, appliances, and furniture

> 59 Individuals received assistance with food stamps

1,481 Households received assistance during the holidays

308

Individuals provided with assistance through immigration support services

600

Elderly residents received help with home repairs

198 People assisted in obtaining permanent housing

> 2,390 Rent/utility assistance payments were made

# AN ADOPTEE'S LONG SEARCH Brings the Joy of New Family

A few weeks before Christmas, Shari Pasanowic got a holiday surprise: She learned she had an older sister who had been given up for adoption as a baby.

Shari was curious - but hesitant to hunt for her newfound sibling. "I got nervous, like what if she doesn't know she's adopted, or she didn't know we exist?" said Shari, now 49. "I was worried about rocking her world."

But when Shari told her younger sister Jackie Boehner the news, it took all of 3 seconds for Jackie to begin searching.

"My mother was only 16 when she had the baby, so we never knew. I was hysterical, crying, when I found out," said Jackie, 35. "I remember it was a Sunday. I immediately Googled adoption agencies in Trenton and started calling around trying to track her down. Because it was a Sunday, I had to wait."

She didn't have to wait long. The next day, Jackie connected with Nancy Morrell of Catholic Charities' Post Adoption Services/ Research and Reunion Program. Catholic Charities helped place thousands of babies in loving adoptive families over the past century, facilitating adoptions until 6 years ago. Consequently, the nonprofit maintains extensive adoption records and assists adoptees and their birth families in finding each other, if both parties have consented. The program helped about 90 people research or reunite with their families last year, Morrell said.

#### **A LONG-SOUGHT REUNION**

In this case, the sister Jackie and Shari never knew about had been trying to find her birth family for decades. Amy Gates, now 51, had reached out to Catholic Charities many years earlier, but her file then had scant details. But when Jackie called in December, Morrell discovered Amy's information in the file and was quickly able to make the connection. By Christmas, the sisters had reunited by phone. In January, Amy traveled from her



Marlton home to Florida, where Jackie and Shari now live, to meet her sisters.

The reunion was bittersweet, because their birth mother Mary Jo Gardus died 35 years ago.

But the sisters bonded over their shared looks - all three have Mary Jo's dark hair, brown eyes, and wide smile. And they marveled at minor coincidences that hinted at larger connections, like mutual affinities for Chapstick, Coke, and JuicyFruit gum and a common "free spirit" personality.  Nancy Morrell of Catholic Charities' Post Adoption Services/Research and Reunion Program assists adoptees and their birth families in finding each other, if both parties have consented.

"We just clicked," Amy said. "It was really fun, and I was very happy that we got along."

The sisters appreciated how quickly Catholic Charities connected them.

"I had backup plans about what exactly I was going to do, if I couldn't find her right away," Jackie said of Amy. "I was going to go to court to try to get her birth certificate. And there's a reality TV show called 'Find my Family' that I applied to. But this was the fastest and easiest finding-yoursiblings-that-you-never-knewyou-had. It was awesome. It was easier than changing a tire."

#### MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME

Catholic Charities used to hire private investigators to assist in searches, Morrell said. But advances like the Internet, social media, and DNA testing have made adoption research easier in recent years, she said. New Jersey lawmakers further facilitated adoption research in 2017 by allowing adopted people to obtain their original birth certificates, which previously had been sealed.

Morrell said her job brings her joy, thanks to reunions like this one.

"The sisters all had so many losses, between not knowing each other, and losing their birth mom so young," said Morrell, who has been with the program and Catholic Charities for over 25 years. "But from this point on, they have each other, and that's good."

Amy plans to move to Florida when her sons, now in high school, graduate. Between them, the sisters have nine children, so they're excited the kids will get to know their new cousins. The sisters feel like their late birth mother would be delighted to see them together now.

"She would have been proud that she made the right decision (to give Amy to adoptive parents), because she was so young at that time," Shari said. "I'm so grateful that we were able to reunite. It's just going to continue to get better."

Amy agreed: "It's a shame I missed out on my sisters all these years, but we will make up for that lost time now." FOR INFORMATION about Catholic Charities' Post Adoption Services/Research and Reunion Program, contact Nancy Morrell at (609) 213–8614 or by email at nmorrell@cctrenton.org.



▲ Shari, Jackie and Amy reunited in January in Florida

## PROVIDENCE HOUSE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

# 20,572

Counseling hours provided to individuals and their children impacted by domestic violence

## 405

Individuals impacted by domestic violence and their children were provided shelter

4,095 Calls fielded by the domestic violence hotline

> 5,662 Individuals received domestic violence training/education

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019

**REVENUE + EXPENSES.** Following is a pre-audit summary of revenues and expenses for the 12-month period ending December 31, 2019.\* Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton continues to be fiscally responsible, fulfilling the stewardship expected by our funders and donors. Approximately 12.6% of our budget is spent on centralized administrative costs.

REVENUES BY MAJOR SOURCE	2019	1.6% Client and Third Party Fees
Medicaid and Medicare	\$18,131,970	- 8.7% Contributions and 3.1% Other
New Jersey Department of Human Services	\$11,027,707	_ O.7% Contributions and 37.9% Medicaid and Medicare
Other Federal, State, County and Municipal Funds	\$11,787,443	
Contributions and Donations	\$4,148,554	24.6% Other Federal,
Client and Third Party Fees	\$778,614	State, County and Municipal
Diocese of Trenton	\$484,922	Funds
Other	\$1,500,950	
TOTAL PROGRAM REVENUE	\$47,860,160	
		of Human Services
EXPENSES BY SERVICE GROUP	2019	
Addiction Services	\$2,331,134	- 10.3% Violence Prevention and 4.8% Addiction Services
Basic Needs Services	\$5,048,858	Treatment Services
Children's Services	\$5,645,538	10.5% Basic Needs Services
Housing Services	\$11,740,871	
Mental Health Counseling Services	\$510,977	– <b>11.7%</b> Children's Services
Services for the Seriously Mentally III	\$17,923,638	
Violence Prevention and Treatment Services	\$4,951,370	
TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES	\$48,152,386	<b>37.2%</b> Services for the Seriously
PROGRAM DEFICIT	(\$292,226)	= 24.4% Housing Services
		1.1% Mental Health Counseling Services

\* A full financial statement may be obtained by writing to: Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton; Attn: George Bontcue, Associate Executive Director/Fiscal Affairs; 383 West State Street, PO Box 1423; Trenton, NJ 08607-1423; GBontcue@cctrenton.org



Here is the sample language for making a bequest to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton:

"I give and bequeath to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton:

the sum of \$; or		
percent of my estate; or		
the property described herein		
to establish/add to the		
Fund.		

The principal is to be endowed and the distributions, as established by the Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton Board of Trustees, shall be used for

#### TO DISCUSS leaving a legacy gift, contact Nancy Tompkins, director of Development and Marketing, (609) 394-5181, ext. 1161, or ntompkins@cctrenton.org.

# **2019 DONORS**

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, would like to thank the individuals, corporations, and foundations that supported our mission in 2019. The following list contains donors who contributed \$250 or more to the mission of Catholic Charities.



The giving levels indicated reflect those of our 2019 Circle of Friends Annual Gifts Campaign. We extend our sincere gratitude to ALL who gave generously throughout the year. Please know that each contribution is valued and appreciated. We would also like to thank our more than

1,600 volunteers for donating more than 17,600 hours in 2019.

#### **LEGACY CIRCLE**

**Planned Gifts to Catholic Charities** Estate of William P. Cunniff Estate of Alexandra Dzikielewski Estate of Henry E. King Estate of Lillian D. Olup Estate of Marion Ploessel

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11

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