

Kevin has utilized several of the services offered by Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton to help him get back on track. Now, he finds new ways to help others. ▶

## NETWORK OF SUPPORT

Helps Create a New Way Forward

There's really no way to know how far or wide the ripple from an act of kindness will spread. Kevin remembers the people in his life who showed him compassion and offered encouragement. Today he spends his days finding new ways to help others. Kevin attends AA regularly and is working to become a sponsor. Last November he joined a church and started attending bible study classes. He enjoys working in the church's food pantry and clothing closet.

"I received help. Why shouldn't I help others?" Kevin said he recently began a pastoral leadership program. "I am learning how to minister on the streets. We do outreach in the neighborhoods." He said his experience talking in front of the group at the Partners in Recovery (PIR) program gave him the confidence he needed to share his story openly with others.

### ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY AT A YOUNG AGE

The son of a single mom, Kevin grew up poor in Bellville, NJ. "We had this dinky little apartment with one bedroom. For a long time, I shared that room with my mom, but when I got older, she gave it to me." Even though he didn't have much, Kevin remembers there were always people

who helped him. "My uncle made sure I lived like a normal kid. He bought me clothes. I had friends and their mothers would look out for me. They made sure I had food; they took me places."

Kevin started working at an early age. At 9 or 10, he said he did odd jobs at the deli down the street from where he lived. "I spent what I earned on candy or video games. Sometimes I gave my mom what I made." When he was 11, he got a job at a pizzeria washing dishes and folding boxes. At 14, he started working at the local supermarket. That is also the age he started drinking alcohol and using drugs.

After high school, Kevin became a maintenance mechanic for refrigeration and food processing machines. He worked at a large beverage manufacturing plant in Flemington. "It was a high stress job." He said when equipment malfunctioned, the production line stopped and there was immense pressure to get things moving again quickly. He came to rely on drugs and alcohol even more. Eventually, he sought help at an outpatient mental health treatment program.



# A Message from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

At the recent groundbreaking ceremony at Providence House in Ocean County, I was reminded of Aesop’s Fable about the bundle of sticks — a single branch can be easily broken, but a bundle of them is strong. Undoubtedly, the partners whom we are fortunate to collaborate with greatly enhance our efforts to break the cycle of domestic violence.

This analogy resonates with Catholic Charities on multiple levels. With over 80 different programs, our agency itself is a comprehensive bundle. We provide a myriad of services, empowering individuals in various aspects in order to live with dignity. In fact, most of those who seek assistance from us benefit from more than a single program.

When Catholic Charities is called upon, we eagerly seize the opportunity to work alongside other organizations, fostering unity and strengthening communities. Through collaboration, we broaden our capacity to serve the most vulnerable among us.

Without the generosity and support you provide, we would not be able to serve all that we do. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for being an integral part of our bundle.

Peace to you,

Marlene Laó-Collins  
Executive Director



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## Guardian Angel Dinner Dance

We offer special thanks to our faithful Sponsors. Throughout the years, their generosity has made it possible for us to serve all those who come to us for help.



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# NETWORK OF SUPPORT

## Helps Create a New Way Forward (continued)

Kevin was laid off and lost access to the treatment program; he could no longer see his psychiatrist. “When I lost my job my doctor dumped me and I was without my medicine for a while.” Thankfully, Kevin discovered Early Intervention Support Services (EISS) in Hamilton in May of 2016. EISS is a psychiatric urgent care program providing rapid access to clinical and psychiatric interventions. Despite not having insurance, Kevin received treatment.

### SERVICES TO ADDRESS DIFFERENT NEEDS

After a month, the counselors at EISS referred Kevin to Catholic Charities’ Guidance Clinic in Trenton. There he met with a psychiatrist regularly, who helped him manage his medications and referred him to PIR for group therapy sessions.

Once he got his substance use under control, Kevin said he began overeating. “I substituted food for the drugs and alcohol and I gained a lot of weight.” At 460 lbs., Kevin was on oxygen and ended up being hospitalized for two weeks with complications of lymphedema. With so many health concerns, Kevin began receiving nurse case management services from CCT’s Behavioral Health Home program. Nurses monitored his health and made sure he was able to get in to see all of the specialists he needed to see, including his dentist. “I was seeing three or four doctors a month — a cardiologist, a pain specialist, a pulmonologist, my primary care doctor. The nurses helped me make my appointments. When I couldn’t drive, they took me there. They handled all the logistics,” he said.

Nurse Care Manager Janese Scarlett worked with Kevin to help him manage his health. “He had so many different doctors. I showed him how to use the calendar feature on his phone to keep track of all of the visits and set up alerts.” She said it was gratifying watching him grow as a person. “Kevin really wanted to change his situation. He followed through on all he needed to do,” said Scarlett. “You can tell he is feeling more confident now. He’s doing a lot of volunteering and giving back.”

“I had a bunch of health issues,” said Kevin. “I had pinched nerves and my knees were blown out. I was dealing with pain all of the time. I was walking with a walker. But I was still coming to Catholic Charities. I was still making progress.” He said he was able to lose



▲ Nurse Care Manager Janese Scarlett worked with Kevin to help him manage his health.

more than 100 lbs. on his own by making smarter food choices, eating less and walking more. Because of the progress he made, Kevin was able to have gastric bypass surgery. Since then, his mobility has improved and he can drive his truck again.

### RECOVERY OPENS NEW DOORS

“The people at Catholic Charities encouraged me.” He said Peer Advocate Robert Brooks was always providing support. “He would tell me to get up and keep moving. If I didn’t have anyone to talk to, Robert talked to me. He didn’t rush me. He made sure I was getting the help I needed.”

“I believe I was a role model to Kevin, influencing him with my example of recovery. He watched me grow and knew that his recovery was possible,” said Brooks. “I have recommended that he pursue classes to become a Peer Specialist or Certified Recovery Support Specialist. I have watched Kevin grow and continue to recover, which is why I think he would make an excellent peer advocate.”

“A lot of good things happened for me at Catholic Charities,” said Kevin. “I feel like God was watching over me and he led me here.”

EISS provides rapid access to short term, recovery-oriented, clinical, and psychiatric and medication management interventions seven days a week. No appointments necessary. For information in Burlington County, call (609) 386-7331; in Mercer County, call (609) 256-4200.

# VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE VITAL TOOLS and Support to Survivors of Abuse

Betsy enjoys helping others and has spent her entire career in the field of social work. In 2001, she worked as a caseworker for Project Reach, a program of Providence House Domestic Violence Services (PHDVS) that focused on supporting individuals over the age of 50 who have experienced domestic violence.

Even after she took a job with another organization in 2006, Betsy decided to continue her work offering support to individuals and families experiencing abuse. She joined the Ocean County Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT).

“Members of the DVRT are trained citizen advocates” said DVRT Specialist Ciara Zdanowicz, who supervises the Ocean County team. “They are volunteers with a passion for this cause; some have past experience as survivors.” At any time of the day or night, DVRT members are dispatched to support survivors of domestic abuse following an incident. “They provide one-time intervention services, showing up at the police station or emergency room, to offer guidance and direction at a really challenging time,” she said.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

“The DVRT program embodies a partnership among police departments, the community and domestic violence service providers,” said Zdanowicz, “so we’re not working in silos. They help fill a gap in services that law enforcement may not be able to deliver because the police are not social workers.” She said the DVRT members arrive with vital resources and information. “The team has proven to be very helpful and we know they have saved lives. Many times a survivor is isolated and they don’t know what’s available to them. Sometimes, it’s even unsafe for them to look for help online.”

“When you see someone trying to free themselves from violent behavior,” said Betsy, “it’s important to give them the tools they’ll need. Show them the steps to take to survive.” When Betsy meets with survivors, she walks them through the process of getting a restraining order. “Even if it is after hours, I let them know the police can call a judge and issue a temporary restraining order.”

She also encourages them to start working on a safety plan they can use when the violence



▲ DVRT Specialist Ciara Zdanowicz and Legal Program Supervisor Laura McCoy

escalates. Betsy tells them to get important documents together in one place so they’ll be ready at a moment’s notice to flee. She encourages them to work with a friend or neighbor to devise a signal or way to communicate. Patterns of abuse are cyclical, and Betsy said it’s important for people to recognize the red flags and be prepared.

## SHOWING SURVIVORS A NEW WAY

“Breaking the cycle of violence can be hard, especially for people who have grown up with violence,” said Betsy. She recalled speaking with one woman about the abuse she had suffered at the hands of her husband and all the while her young son was physically attacking her. “It’s heart-rending to see a two-year-old screaming at his mother and kicking her. That is learned behavior — a generational history of abuse.”

Some of the most important information Betsy shares with survivors are the many services available through Providence House. “I go over everything with them – the safe house and the counseling,” she said. “And I let them know it is all free and confidential.”

Providence House provides domestic violence services in Burlington and Ocean counties and offers free trainings for DVRT members two times a year. “It’s a 40-hour program,” said Zdanowicz, “that includes some in-person learning and some online training across ten weeks.” A new series of trainings will begin this fall. Classes will be held Friday evenings at the Burlington Township Police Department on Old York Road from 6 to 9 p.m.

**FOR INFORMATION** about or to join the DVRT program in Ocean county, contact Ciara Zdanowicz at (732) 350-2120 x8418 or [czdanowicz@cctrenton.org](mailto:czdanowicz@cctrenton.org). In Burlington county, contact Ashley Trodgon at (856) 824-0599 x8606 or [atrodgon@cctrenton.org](mailto:atrodgon@cctrenton.org).

# SAFE HOUSE

## Improvements Underway

This summer, Providence House Domestic Violence Services celebrated two safe house milestones!

During an Open House in June, the Burlington County team welcomed visitors to its newly renovated safe house. The large communal bedrooms were reconfigured. Smaller bedrooms with doors in between were created, making spaces adaptable for different sized families. The modifications also improved accessibility and privacy in the bathrooms.

While safety protocols for social distancing during COVID 19 were the impetus for this change, Mary Pettrow, Service Area Director for Children and Family Services, said the new configuration has other benefits as well. “In addition to creating more flexibility in how accommodations can be arranged, the new design provides a more trauma-informed space that will go a long way in addressing survivors’ emotional well-being.”

The cost of renovations was covered by funding from the Burlington County Community Development Block Grant CARES Act and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Community Planning and Development Division.

In August, US Congressman Chris Smith joined the Ocean County team to break ground for major renovations on its safe house. A \$750,000 Community Development Fund request made by Rep. Smith will cover the cost of the improvements.

“These significant renovations will make a huge difference by enabling this incredible, life-saving mission to assist even more individuals on their journey toward safety and recovery as they break free from the cycle of violence,” said Smith.

The changes to the Ocean County safe house will be similar to those in Burlington. The dormitory-style bedrooms will be made into smaller rooms. There will also be an addition, featuring new rooms of living space.



▲ Shovels poised, (from left) Mary Pettrow, Catholic Charities’ Service Area Director of Children and Family Services; Anna Martinez, NJ Department of Children And Families Director of the Division on Women; Brenda Rascher, Executive Director of the Office of Catholic Social Services at the Diocese of Trenton; US Congressman Chris Smith; Marlene Laó-Collins, Catholic Charities’ Executive Director; Susan Loughery, Catholic Charities’ Associate Executive Director of Operations and Ocean County Commissioner Bobbi Jo Crea break ground on a renovation project at Catholic Charities Providence House Domestic Violence Services safe house in Ocean County.

“This funding answers a prayer,” said Pettrow. “We feel extraordinarily blessed to have such an ardent supporter in Congressman Smith. We are grateful for his commitment to ensuring the physical and emotional needs of survivors of domestic abuse are being met.”

Last August, Smith toured the safe house and met with Executive Director Marlene Laó-Collins, Associate Executive Director Susan Loughery, Pettrow and Providence House Program Director Danielle Meyer. They discussed the logistical challenges employees faced ensuring client safety across so many locations as well as the massive influx of survivors who sought refuge during the pandemic. In 2022, Providence House provided 34,330 nights of shelter, nearly three-and-a-half times its capacity.

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

# COMMUNITY SERVICES TEAM MEMBER

## Deployed to Florida to Provide Disaster Relief

After Hurricane Sandy ravaged the New Jersey coast in October of 2012, Nancy Correa joined Catholic Charities' Disaster Case Management Program (DCMP) for what she thought would be a six-month stint helping individuals and families rebuild their lives.

"I did assessments to identify people's needs, helped people find resources for reconstruction and individuals who were homeless find temporary housing," said Correa. Because the storm displaced thousands of families and the need for recovery support was so great, funding for the program was extended; Correa spent two-and-a-half years in the role.

Fast forward to January 2023. Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice, Inc. (CCDOV) needed help providing disaster relief after Hurricane Ian. The storm sliced a path across Florida in September of 2022; storm surges flooded coastal towns, damaging more than 30,000 homes.

Along with her colleague Dana Naturale, Correa packed a bag and headed south. She and Naturale spent three weeks working out of CCDOV's Bonita Springs office assisting displaced residents. The pair shared a rented home in Fort Myers with relief workers from CC agencies in Texas and Pennsylvania who were also deployed there.

Noelle Davies, Program Manager of the agency's most recent disaster response program, explains: "Catholic Charities is an international provider of choice for disaster response due to a proven history of fast and effective response here in the Garden State, which is largely the result of its ability leveraging its interconnected network of Dioceses across the globe. I am proud of this agency's commitment to respond to the call for mutual aid from CCDOV."

"During my time supporting the Superstorm Sandy DCMP, alongside Nancy, I saw our agency lead a statewide initiative across five dioceses, which included four offices and 50 team members within Catholic



▲ Nancy Correa (right) and Dana Naturale were deployed earlier this year as part of a disaster relief team to help Florida residents recover after Hurricane Ian ripped across the state last September.

Charities Diocese of Trenton alone. All of this was mobilized within the first year of the program's grant in order to support thousands of impacted NJ residents," said Davies. "It is important to note that staff like Nancy were able to connect with and help vulnerable community members, even when they themselves may have been feeling the impacts of the disaster in their own lives. I am in awe of my team and what we were able to accomplish!"

### BACK IN FLORIDA

"We made some good connections. We were able to link people with the Bridge Fund, a local non-profit that offers resources in the community. They received up to \$1,000 for supplies or new appliances." Correa, who is bilingual, was able to provide support to Spanish-speaking people who needed services. "There was a large immigrant population in the area. Many of them were living on the beach or in the woods," she said.

"Leaving home for three weeks was not an easy thing to do," said Correa. She helps care for her four grandchildren and they missed her very much. "But I

was willing to help because I love what we do and what we represent in the community.”

Correa has worked in several Community Service Area programs since joining the agency in 2014. She provided trauma informed case management and advocacy through CCT’s Human Trafficking program. She also participated in the NJ Hope and Healing Crisis Counseling Program, offering counseling and peer-based support to people who reached out for help during the COVID 19 pandemic. Today, she works as a case manager in the COVID Rapid-Rehousing and Homeless Prevention Program.

“I have always been given the opportunity to learn in new positions at Catholic Charities,” said Correa. She said Arnold Valentin, Service Area Director of Community Services, has always recognized her contributions and been willing to match her skill set to new opportunities. “I am grateful to Mr. Valentin,” she said.

Correa is a Theology Professor, and she and her husband, the Rev. Dr. Dan Correa, are ordained



▲ Part of Nancy’s assignment was doing assessments of damage done to homes in the Bonita Springs area following the harrowing hurricane.

ministers through the Assembly of God Fellowship. They serve eight parishes, four in New Jersey and four in the Caribbean.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on programs available through Community Services, call (800) 360-7711.

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

### VOLUNTEER

One way to serve is by joining a County Board where you can have a direct impact on those in your community who come to us for help.

To learn more, contact Hollis Painting at [hpainting@cctrenton.org](mailto:hpainting@cctrenton.org), (609) 394-5181 x.1159



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- We are feeding more people than ever before. In 2022, the number of visits to our food pantries increased by nearly 30%.
- We are reducing homelessness. Last year, we made over 50% more rental assistance and utility payments to help keep families in their homes.
- We hired an immigration attorney who can fully support people on the path to becoming a U.S. citizen.

[www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/restore](http://www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/restore)

