



FINDING COMMUNITY

Behavioral Health Services Brighten Jason's Future

Programs at Delaware House, Behavioral Health Services Center in Westampton, have helped Jason in several key areas of his life. The lifelong Burlington County resident has received help managing his medications, securing a place to live and finding a job. But maybe the most valuable thing for Jason was learning that he is not the only one who is learning to deal with their mental health.

Jason said he found others who are going through similar situations. He also discovered there are plenty of people who are ready to help. In March 2019, Jason needed assistance managing his mental health, and enrolled in the Outpatient program at Delaware House. He had recently been released from the hospital and hoped to get support dealing with his well-being. At first, he thought the program wasn't for him, and he wanted to return to work.

PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF

Thankfully, Jason persisted. "After I was in the Outpatient program, I relapsed and realized I needed to be here. I needed more help." He joined the Partial Care

program and began attending group therapy sessions. "I have found a lot of support here. My counselors gave me hope. They told me things would get better over time, I would just have to be patient," he said.

"There are many different groups that can help you, depending on your needs," said Jason. Sessions helped him with interpersonal relationships, setting healthy boundaries and exploring spirituality. "Everyone is really friendly. And the counselors make you feel like a priority. They encouraged me to seek the help I need. They would say, 'Reach out more. Don't isolate.' Soon, I was able to start advocating for myself."

A SAFE PLACE TO CALL HOME

In July 2019, Jason needed help finding a place to live. Fortunately, he found a spot in one of Catholic Charities' residential group homes, living in a house with three others. In the group home, support staff are on-site around the clock to help when needed. They also work with the residents on the life skills they are trying to build.



A Message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

As our year draws to a close, I have been reflecting on the growing number of people who have turned to Catholic Charities for assistance — more than 110,000 in 2023. As I think of all those who come to us and our team who serve them, Paul’s letter to the Galatians comes to mind: “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up.”

In a time of giving, Paul’s words remind me that *faith is a gift*.

It lifts us up and provides the strength we need to continue doing good work. It sustains us so we can attend to the needs of others. When someone comes to us, we can help. We take care of immediate issues first — do they have enough to eat? Have they got a safe place to stay? Do they have medical issues to address?

Then we help in the long term. We provide support in managing physical and mental health. We help them find employment or training. Our goal is to give each person what they need to live safely and comfortably — to help them grow and become autonomous.

We can treat our neighbors in this healing, holistic way because of donors like you, who value our mission. You understand why we need to find **all** the ways we can serve the most vulnerable among us. Thank you for holding faith with us.

Wishing you joy this season,

Marlene Laó-Collins
Executive Director



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Winter Warmth Drive

As the weather turns colder, Catholic Charities is on a mission to ensure everyone we serve stays warm this winter. We are collecting new hats, gloves and scarves to be distributed to the individuals we serve.

Donations can be dropped off at 383 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08618 between 9 am and 4 pm, Monday through Friday until December 18th.

For more information or questions, contact Hollis Painting at (609) 394-5181 x1159 or hpainting@cctrenton.org.



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FINDING COMMUNITY

Behavioral Health Services Brighten Jason's Future (continued)

"Living in the group home was nice," he said. "It helped me get used to doing chores, cooking for myself and managing my meds." In September 2022, Jason transitioned from his group home into a supported apartment. He has been living independently for more than a year now with support staff who are on call if he needs assistance. He said he enjoys having his own place — even though now he is responsible for all the chores.

GETTING STARTED ON HIS CAREER

The Supported Employment team at Delaware House helped Jason obtain a job as a Guest Associate at Target. "I love it," he said. "It's calming, even though it can be busy at times. I really enjoy helping the customers."

"I've had jobs before," said Jason, who had worked in fast food restaurants, "so I knew about the process." He said Supported Employment Specialist Ann Marie Harrison ensured he was prepared for his Target interview. "She helped me update my resume and practice answering questions. She had me explain how I could help the company." She also provided transportation to the interviews.

"Jason has been great to work with," said Harrison. "He has taken each twist and turn he encountered and used it to learn and grow from. He has worked very hard to get where he is today, and his positivity is contagious. I often hear Jason sharing encouraging words and laughs with his peers. I am excited to see where else his perseverance and determination take him."

In addition to his job at Target, Jason is attending the Burlington County Institute of Technology, studying to become a Dental Assistant. "I like to smile," said Jason, whose entire face lights up when he does. "And I would like to support people with their well-being and help them smile." Jason said he thinks it will be a good career for him because it is hands on and he is very detail-oriented. "Plus, it pays well and I will be able to provide for myself."



▲ The Supported Employment team helped Jason obtain his job as a Guest Associate at Target. He really enjoys helping the customers.

RECREATIONAL PURSUITS AS WELL

Jason is also a member of the Riverbank Self-Help Center, a peer-led program that supports individuals by addressing wellness in many dimensions. When he was living in the group home, he found the programs at Riverbank to be enjoyable. Since moving to his apartment, he still stays connected. "There are a lot of activities, and it's good to go out into the community. I also enjoy the warm meals offered on Wednesday nights." He said additional groups and therapy sessions at Riverbank are also great if you are open to learning new things.

"I am glad Catholic Charities has all of these services for people," said Jason. "Meeting other people and knowing I am not alone in my struggles has been helpful."

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the array of Behavioral Health Services provided, please visit www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org/services/mental-health or call (800) 360-7711.

34th Annual Guardian Angel Dinner Dance

What an amazing event we had this year! The new location at The Merion in Burlington County was a magnificent venue worthy of hosting the amazing people we honored this year:

- Richard J. Hughes Humanitarian Award – Michael W. Herbert
- Light of Hope Award – Msgr. Dennis Apoldite
- Light of Hope Award – The Woman's League of Mount Holly
- Corporate Citizen of the Year Award – Dr. Eric I. Schwartz
- Client Achievement Award – Brandon

In addition to honoring our community partners, we were excited to raise much needed funding for our Providence House safe houses. Our Donate Now goal was to raise \$9,000 for new washers, dryers and a commercial refrigerator. Everyone's generosity came through and we raised \$8,300. While falling just short, we couldn't be more grateful for the support we received and the ability to provide these items to ensure our families can have clean clothes and healthy food.

We also had a record year for our 50/50 Raffle - \$28,000! Again, we were in awe of the kindness shown by those who came to the event and joined our crusade to provide for those less fortunate with dignity and respect.

Everyone's donations bring hope to so many and show love to our most vulnerable neighbors. Because of our donors, no one is ever turned away and no one will be.



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LEARNING LIFE'S LESSONS ON THE FARM

Camp Offers Safe Summer Alternative

For nearly 20 years, children whose families receive services through El Centro have been attending Fiddlehead Summer Camp at Fernbrook Farms in Chesterfield. Thanks to the farm's Urban Youth Scholarship program, they attend free of charge. This year, more than 50 campers from El Centro enjoyed the opportunity to explore the outdoors and learn about farm life.

"Our mission is to get all young people outside to engage in nature," said Brian Kuser, who is the Educational Director and Summer Camp Director at Fernbrook Farms. "Our scholarship program is our way of giving back to the community and making sure children from Trenton have the chance to experience and learn about nature."

Kuser's family has owned the farm since 1899. The scholarship program is a big part of why Fernbrook began its Environmental Education Center in 2005. The Center is a non-profit organization with a mission to provide hands-on educational experiences to young people.

"Camp is really wonderful for the children," said El Centro's Program Director Roberto Hernandez. "They get out of the city and run around all day. They feed the animals, plant things and do arts and crafts. There is a little creek there and they get to try fishing too." He said the campers are between the ages of 8 and 12. "Children at that age are at a high risk of becoming engaged in gang activity," said Hernandez. "Going to camp reduces the chances that they'll be indoctrinated into a gang."

Hernandez recalled one camper whose father worked on a farm. After attending camp, and learning about planting and harvesting, he had a new outlook on how his father earned a living. "He was no longer



▲ For years, children of the families served by El Centro have been invited to attend summer camp, to get them out of the city and give them an opportunity to learn more about nature.

embarrassed about what his father did. He said, 'My father helps feed the world.' He understood how important that work is. And his was a job worthy of respect."

Hernandez said he has known Larry Kuser, who owns the farm with this wife Suzie, for more than 40 years. "The kids get a kick out of going to camp," he said. "We are grateful to Larry and everyone at the farm for giving these children a chance to have so much fun. And to stay safe."

Founded in 1999, El Centro has been a trusted resource in Trenton's immigrant communities for those seeking help. El Centro provides advocacy, referrals, counseling, GED and ESL classes, citizenship classes, immigration services, clothing and food.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about El Centro, call (609) 394-2056.

NJ4S MERCER HUB

Coordinating Mental Health Services for Students

Last October, in her testimony to the NJ Legislature's Joint Committee on Public Schools, Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Christine Norbut Beyer declared, "It's clear that youth mental health is a public health emergency."

This April, in an effort to address the growing mental health care crisis among New Jersey's young people, DCF introduced a new hub and spoke model to provide mental well-being and prevention services to students across the state. Catholic Charities' Children and Family Services Area was selected as the New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S) hub provider for Mercer County.

"We are extremely proud to be a part of this bold project," said Director of Children and Family Services Mary Pettrow. "With a nearly 40-year history of delivering and innovating mental health services for children, our team is ready to ensure access to and equity in mental wellness services for students and families across Mercer County," she said.

A STRONG NETWORK IS ALREADY IN PLACE

"Catholic Charities is a long-time partner of DCF," added Pettrow. "We have been providing Mobile Response and Stabilization Services and administering the Family Growth Program for many years. We have been providing counseling and timely interventions to children in crisis. We have also worked closely with other organizations, developing a network of community partners and providers that is quite robust. We look forward to tapping into that system in our role as Mercer's hub," she said.

"Fred Rogers is often quoted as saying, 'Look for the helpers,'" said Hub Director Michael Lovaglio. "When he was a boy, to ease his anxiety when something scary and horrific happened, Rogers' mother would tell him to 'look for the helpers' because helpers inspire hope. The act of helping, the empathy that encourages helping,



▲ Recently, NJ Spotlight News mental health writer Bobby Brier (from left) met with Program Director Sully Soto and Hub Director Michael Lovaglio to learn more about the NJ4S Mercer Hub and how it will serve students.

creates and maintains a culture of hope and a belief that there are solutions to problems," he said.

"NJ4S Mercer is one of many programs in Mercer County whose staff are eager to help," Lovaglio continued. "We look forward to collaborating with community members, fellow non-profits, schools, churches, mosques, and synagogues to provide prevention education to students and families. We are proudly just one part of a coordinated community response."

THREE-TIERED SYSTEM FOR MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS

Lovaglio explained how his team of service coordinators, prevention consultants and clinicians will manage the implementation of prevention programs that address things like bullying, suicide prevention and substance use using a three-tiered model of services. "The first tier consists of universal prevention programming, which is educational in nature," he said. It may include webinars, assemblies, trainings, evidence-based interventions, workshops in community spaces, tutoring at family success centers or YouTube content.



Universal Prevention Programming

The second tier consists of evidence-based prevention and small group interventions. Tier 3 is for students with more acute needs. “Here we will ensure students receive intensive assessments and brief clinical interventions,” said Lovaglio. “The aim of NJ4S is to integrate existing programs and supports to avoid a duplication of services. Students will be linked to existing programs within the community.”

Public participation is a major feature in the new NJ4S system and each hub was tasked with recruiting a local Advisory Board. This body is comprised of students, parents, school personnel, social service agencies, businesses, faith-based organizations and community leaders, who will offer ongoing input and direction to the hub. Lovaglio said the Mercer Advisory Board has been meeting since

Targeted Evidence-Based Prevention

June and has already outlined Areas of Focus and some of the evidence-based curriculum the hub will follow.

“Prevention education is the foundation of our work, and our consultants are trained to provide it in either a larger group setting like an assembly, or a smaller context like a classroom,” said Lovaglio. “Whether they use curriculum with an emphasis on drawing or painting, reading and the discussion of a story, or writing poems and essays on emotion, our mission is to implement mental health and wellness education. We’ve been developing curriculum since June and are excited that the academic year is upon us, so we can be helpers.”

Intensive

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FOR MORE INFORMATION about NJ4S Mercer Hub, call (609) 394-5157.

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To learn more, contact Hollis Painting at hpainting@cctrenton.org, (609) 394-5181 x1159



<https://www.catholiccharitiesrenton.org/careers/>



One person, one family at a time – we help people overcome adversity and trauma.



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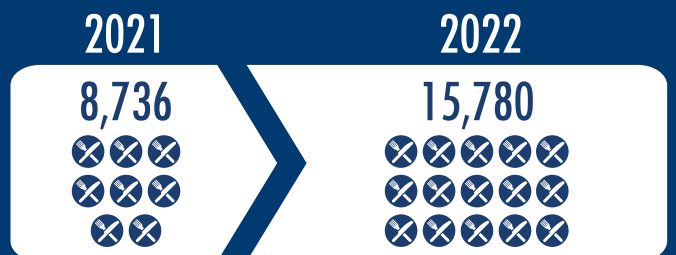
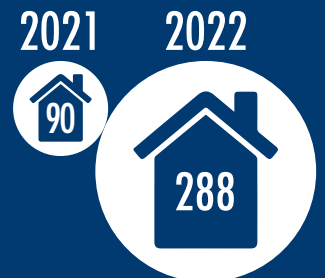
It is with great pride, enthusiasm and appreciation, we report the progress of the Restoring Dignity, Giving Hope Campaign.

www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org/restore



Ocean Safe House nights of shelter provided—more than the prior three years combined

Families assisted through the Rapid-Rehousing program



Number of individuals served by our food pantries