

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES UPDATE

A CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA NEWSLETTER



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FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS HELP FILL THE GAP

Feeding Families, Body and Soul

Last year, the Catholic Charities (CC) network of agencies provided more than 44 million meals to 12 million people across the country, adding 450 new food distribution sites to meet the problem of food insecurity, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic and, more recently, inflation. With grocery prices in early 2022 up 6.3% over the previous year, average rents up 13.5%, and 20% of Americans struggling to pay their energy bills, families' needs for supplemental food are great.



Food assistance, in its many forms, is the single largest service provided by the CC network and is often the entry point for people in need of other services – CC staff frequently identify additional needs when working with individuals and families seeking groceries.

Catholic Charities of Corpus Christi, for instance, operates six food pantries, including walk-up pantries that provide bags of groceries and a client choice pantry at which clients do their own shopping. One of the agency's pantries in Flour Bluff also prepares meals each weekend for students who are either living in hotels or motels or are homeless, a program that is now serving more than 60 children, elementary to high school age. "Without the pantry, I would have nothing to eat," said one client. "If I couldn't come to your pantry," said another, "I would have to [forgo] paying a utility bill or rent."

St. Vincent's Food Pantry of Catholic Charities of Northern Nevada is the largest food distribution pantry in the state, serving about 30,000 people per month. The agency also distributes food and services through 38 partner pantries – including its first client choice pantry – that serve about 3,000 families per month in an 11-county region.

Before the pandemic, the agency had 22 partner pantries, but the need has grown exponentially, as have shipping costs, said Carlos Carrillo, CC Northern Nevada food pantry program director. As freight costs doubled and then tripled, the agency decided to try a new tack. Now it gets fresh bread, tortillas, milk and cheese three times each week from area vendors, reducing storage needs, pumping money into the local economy and helping small businesses stay afloat during the pandemic. It has been "a game changer," said Carlos. "A win-win."

With grocery prices on the rise, more clients are shopping at the pantries — about 35% to 40% more since the pandemic began.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT THAT WORKS

From Employee to Entrepreneur

Catholic Charities of Omaha has helped clients in its Microbusiness and Asset Development Training Program launch more than 1,500 new ventures with a goal of erasing poverty through entrepreneurship. At the core of an ever-expanding offering of resources and educational opportunities is a 16-class business training course that covers all the basics – writing marketing plans, branding, identifying target markets and audiences, understanding taxes and accounting, creating financial projections, securing insurance and formalizing a human resources function.

“Poverty is a major issue in our community here in Omaha, and it’s a major issue in every community,” said Father Mike Eckley, executive director of CC Omaha.

Overcoming poverty has been a goal for Sylvia, who – after years of working for others – now owns and operates her own cleaning business, which is certified by the Cleaning Management Institute, one of the most recognized education and certification providers in the professional cleaning industry. Then there’s Wilfredo and Fredi, who started a construction business that now competes to be selected as a sub-contractor by the city and large private businesses.

After 25 years of successful workforce development in Omaha, the agency decided to reach beyond the city to train other member agency staff to do the same. In August 2021, it officially launched its first microbusiness program outside of Omaha by engaging the Catholic Charities member agency in Puerto Rico. Ultimately, the plan is to collaborate with five additional agencies within three years to help people help themselves.

Said Father Mike, “This program ... recognizes the dignity of the individual and rewards that person who wants to work hard and take a risk.”

“This program helps people break that cycle of poverty and find new hope and new opportunity... new promise.”

– Father Mike Eckley



DISASTER RELIEF PROGRAMS MOBILIZE FOR SUCCESS

Response Goes Virtual, Stays Personal

Tornadoes. Hurricanes. Wildfires. Every disaster, no matter how big or small, is a disaster, most especially for the community where it happens. Catholic Charities agencies must mobilize quickly and effectively to support those most affected.

Catholic Charities USA provided 75 emergency disaster grants to its member agencies in 2021 alone, a 36% increase over the average of just a few years before.

In total, Catholic Charities assisted more than 495,000 people, distributing more than \$6.3 million in disaster assistance funds.

In the midst of the pandemic, Catholic Charities agencies had to become more agile to support and serve clients, which is why CCUSA launched the Virtual Agency Staff Assistance Program (V-ASAP).

This innovative program allows experienced disaster case management staff to provide timely, direct support to local agencies post-disaster without having to travel to the site. For example, CC agency staff in New York City and Reno assisted disaster survivors in Baton Rouge after Hurricane Ida – assessing their needs, walking them through the FEMA registration process, providing virtual gift cards as well as comfort and reassurance. This support not only assists overburdened local agencies in a disaster area, it also gets help more quickly to those who need it.





Across the country, CC agencies were inundated with calls from Ida evacuees, some from as far away as CC of Paterson, New Jersey – more than 1,300 miles from the Gulf Coast – which reported a few evacuees there and wondered what they could do to help. Nearby, CC Newark provided two bed sets for a woman and her daughter whose apartment had flooded and who were staying with a friend while their landlord made repairs.

A veteran whose service-related injuries prevented her from preparing for the storm or cleaning up after was aided by CC of South Mississippi, which hired a contractor and purchased the materials needed to restore her flooded home.



CC agencies are also in it for the long-term, ensuring their disaster response and recovery efforts include outreach to the socially vulnerable populations often overlooked following a disaster.

HOUSING INITIATIVES RESTORE DIGNITY

Leaving the Streets Behind

At its heart, the Healthy Housing Initiative (HHI) is about seeing the dignity of every person. A person-centered, comprehensive approach to chronic homelessness, the program meets people where they are and moves them into permanent supportive housing that provides critical social services. A five-year pilot, HHI works in collaboration with Catholic healthcare entities and includes five Catholic Charities agencies in Detroit, Las Vegas, Portland (Oregon), St. Louis and Spokane.

The goals for HHI are: to reduce chronic homelessness in each city by 20%; to decrease ER visits and hospital readmission rates once clients are housed by 25%; and to connect 35% of now-housed clients to primary care and behavioral health services. To date, the participating agencies have housed 231 people.

On any given night, more than 83,000 Americans with debilitating health conditions and a long history of homelessness sleep on streets, in shelters or in

other places not meant for human habitation. These men and women frequently have a combination of mental health problems, substance abuse and medical conditions that worsen over time and too often lead to an early death. They are the “chronically homeless.”

Jason used to be one of them. Now 51 and housed, he had been living in foster and group homes or on the streets since he was 11. His adult life has been riddled with depression, anxiety and self-medication through alcohol and drugs, leading to a significant substance use disorder. Lack of education and training have rendered him largely unemployable, and traumatic experiences with the child welfare system have made him distrustful of social services. But six months ago, Jason moved into an HHI unit. Now stably housed, his blood pressure is lower, his alcohol consumption is down and he engages regularly with medical and behavioral health providers.

Jason also has a community of neighbors to support him as he supports them. “I have found a place where I can leave my shame behind.”





AFGHANS RESETTLED, LIVES REBUILT

One Man's Providential Story

A strange confluence of events in December 2021 made it abundantly clear to the staff at Catholic Charities of Owensboro, Kentucky, what a small world it is. The agency was in the midst of helping to resettle about 170 Afghans who had escaped conflict in their home country in August. (As of March 2022, approximately 12,000 Afghans were resettled in 36 states through the efforts of Catholic Charities, with about 2,000 more expected before the end of September 2022.)

Then, on December 10, a series of deadly tornadoes cut a wide path through the middle of the country, causing utter devastation. Neighboring cities Mayfield and Dawson Springs were hit hard. That evening, the Afghan community huddled together in a corridor of their Owensboro hotel to wait out the storm. One of their own, Khaibar Shafaq, had been acting as a translator/coordinator/chief spreadsheet maker for the group – leadership roles he'd filled throughout the long journey from Kabul through Germany, Washington, D.C., Fort Pickett in Blackstone, Virginia, and ultimately to Kentucky. Khaibar stepped up again when CC-Owensboro Executive Director Susan Montalvo-Gesser told him she would be pivoting to disaster relief and that impending resettlement meetings might be delayed. He asked one question: "Can I help you?" With a long background in disaster field work for the Red Cross in the Middle East and Africa, Khaibar soon found himself the newest member of the CC staff. He's now a disaster relief case manager and paralegal for the Afghan community.

He moved quickly into action, assessing survivors' needs – FEMA, insurance, mental health, employment – for the near- and long-term. "They need someone to be with them and to walk along with them," he said, "to rebuild what they have lost."

Having left everything behind in Kabul, and with his wife and three children stuck in Istanbul, Khaibar knows a little something about loss. He is philosophical about it, and about escaping the calamity at home, only to find himself helping others through their own disasters. "I had a kind of feeling that's why God sent me to Kentucky," he said.

“Khaibar’s presence here is providential. There’s no other way to say it — he was placed here by God to lead us through this event. It was his offer, that he said he has this experience. I knew then that we were going to be okay.”

Catholic Charities Owensboro
Executive Director Susan
Montalvo-Gesser

“It is scary not to be able to pay your bills, and I’ve learned that there is no shame in asking for help.”

– Catholic Charities client



FRANCIS FUND STAVES OFF EVICTIONS

There’s No Place Like Home

The Catholic Charities USA Francis Fund for Eviction Prevention was created at a time of heightened unemployment and food insecurity and was intended to help those in extreme danger of losing their homes. In total, Catholic Charities agencies distributed 247 grants from the Francis Fund, amounting to more than \$2.4 million.

That money made the difference for a newly unemployed widower who came to CC of Northwest Florida looking for flexible work so he could pay his rent and care for his three little girls. Their mother had just died of COVID, and his own battle with the disease cost him his job. The agency immediately gave him enough groceries for his family, and staff began case management. He now has a new job, and the family has stayed in their home and started to rebuild their lives.

A grant from the Francis Fund also kept a couple and their three children at home in Opelousas, Louisiana. When COVID hit and restaurants began closing, the husband was laid off from his trucking job hauling food. The family was in serious financial stress by the time he found work. Depressed and desperate, they contacted Catholic Charities of Acadiana, the first time they had ever asked for help. The agency paid the family’s back rent plus utilities to get them up-to-date.

“I was always taught to give but no one teaches you how to receive,” the grateful husband said. “I’m so grateful to Catholic Charities. We now have a new start.”



To learn more about the Catholic Charities ministry, visit [CatholicCharitiesUSA.org](https://www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org) or call us at 703-549-1390.