

CARITAS NOW

CATHOLIC CHARITIES BROOKLYN AND QUEENS MAGAZINE | STORIES OF THOSE WE SERVE

125+

YEARS OF CHANGING LIVES



Support,
Connection,
and Care

LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to present the latest edition of *Caritas Now Magazine*, our Spring 2026 issue titled “Support, Connection, and Care.” As we mark 127 years of service to the communities of Brooklyn and Queens, this issue highlights the remarkable journeys of the individuals we serve — stories that remind us why our mission matters and how deeply hope and resilience run through our community.

Within these pages, you will meet Eliseo Ilarraza, who — despite living with ALS and communicating through assistive technology — has earned multiple degrees, authored seven books, and continues to pursue doctoral studies from his home at our John Paul II Apartments. His story is a testament to what becomes possible when safe, stable housing is paired with compassionate, consistent care.

You will also read about Janeet, a mother from Mexico whose determination to advocate for her ill daughter led her to our ESOL Program, where eight months of dedication have transformed not only her English skills, but also her confidence and voice. And you will meet Denise and her daughter Sharice Longhorn, whose family found both relief and community through our Alzheimer’s Social Adult Day Program — a program that supports not just the individual with dementia, but the entire caregiving family.

We honor Clyde Rhymes, a 95-year-old volunteer at St. Benedict the Moor Food Pantry; Rhoda Schepps, who found belonging at Narrows Older Adult Center; Carmen Swann, who healed at Corona Behavioral Health Clinic; and young Adnan, whose progress at Colin-Newell Center has brought hope to his family. Each of these stories reflects the profound impact that thoughtful, coordinated care can have — and the extraordinary resilience of the people we are privileged to serve.

This issue also includes a special insert featuring our 2025 Impact Statement and financial overview, offering transparency into how your generous contributions create lasting change in our communities. We are deeply grateful for your continued support and partnership.

Peace,


Monsignor Alfred LoPinto
President and CEO
Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens





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*** SPECIAL INSERT -- 2025 IMPACT STATEMENT ***

For over 125 years, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens has been providing quality social services to the neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens and currently offers 160-plus programs and services for children, youth, adults, older adults, and those struggling with mental illness. Since 1975, Catholic Charities Progress of Peoples Development Corporation, the affordable housing developer of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, has been transforming vacant land and buildings into affordable housing units and transforming the lives of individuals and families. We've completed more than 4,567 units with supportive services for seniors, families, veterans and the formerly homeless. Since 2020, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens has provided much-needed food packages and services at 60 Catholic Charities parish-based food pantries and has distributed over \$19 million in food.

CARITAS NOW Magazine will bring you quarterly insight into the programs and services offered by Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens. For more information, or to be removed from our list, contact:
CARITAS NOW MAGAZINE: 191 Joralemon Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201
CARITASNOW@ccbq.org or 718-722-6202

Stories That Inspire

Welcome to our Spring 2026 issue! As we enter a new season, we continue to face familiar challenges while also celebrating the successes of last year through the inspiring journeys of our clients. These stories emphasize the powerful influence of hope and resilience within our community and showcase how Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens empowers individuals to reclaim their lives and thrive

Unstoppable Mind: Eliseo's ALS Journey to a Master's Degree, a Writing Life, and a Legacy

At 34 years old, Eliseo Ilarraza was diagnosed with ALS, a progressive neurological disease that damages motor neurons, which are the nerve cells that control voluntary muscle movement. As the disease progresses, people lose the ability to move muscles for speaking, walking, swallowing, and breathing. In Eliseo's case, ALS eventually required a tracheostomy and full-time ventilator support. He communicates by writing with his eyes through assistive technology. At 56 years old, he now lives at **Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' John Paul II Apartments**, where social workers have arranged skilled nursing care and aides available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Around 2019-2020, Eliseo moved into the John Paul II Apartments, one of 34 affordable housing buildings operated by Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens. At Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, providing access to safe, stable, and affordable housing is central to our mission of strengthening and uplifting communities.

"John Paul II Apartments provides more than affordable housing. The community provides a clean, comfortable, and welcoming environment where I can live with

dignity, stability, and peace. That difference matters greatly for someone in my medical condition," Eliseo said. "A hospital or nursing home often focuses on clinical survival, but John Paul II Apartments gives me a true home."

John Paul II Apartments provides Eliseo with a stable environment where his care team can deliver the constant care his medical condition requires. With stable housing and a supportive care team, Eliseo is able to focus on his passions.

"Although ALS changed my body, it did not remove my calling," Eliseo said. "I continue to read, write, study, pray, and encourage others every day, and I try to show people that a life with severe disability can remain productive, meaningful, and full of love."

Writing and education are two of the most prominent expressions of Eliseo's passions and purpose. He has written seven books, with more in progress, and he has also written a large body of Christian music and poetry. Several of Eliseo's titles focus directly on resilience, faith, and spiritual perseverance, and he plans to continue publishing.

Eliseo has earned three degrees: a Bachelor of Science in Human

Services, a Master of Social Work (MSW) in 2021, and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2023. Today, he is continuing his education as a dual doctoral student, pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) in Project Management at Liberty University and a Doctorate in Data Science at National University. Eliseo also holds a New York State life and health insurance license. Before ALS progressed, he worked as a case manager in Sunset Park and as a counselor in a local hospital.

"Although ALS changed my body, it did not remove my calling. I continue to read, write, study, pray, and encourage others every day, and I try to show people that a life with severe disability can remain productive, meaningful, and full of love." --Eliseo



"I always loved the helping profession, and that passion still drives me," Eliseo said. "Education gave me the tools to serve others more effectively, and my current doctoral studies continue that same purpose at a higher level."

Through affordable housing, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens fosters stability, independence, and safety for its residents.

"The environment allows me to focus on doctoral coursework, writing books, composing Christian music and poetry, and staying connected with others," Eliseo said. "In a hospital or nursing home, the atmosphere often limits independence and makes long-term study difficult. At John Paul II Apartments, I can live in a way that preserves dignity, concentration, and purpose."

For Eliseo, John Paul II Apartments is more than a place to live—it is the foundation that allows his life's work to continue. At John Paul II Apartments, he has not only found the care he needs, but also the space to continue learning, creating, and serving others.

"I feel genuine gratitude for John Paul II Apartments. I thank God for opening that door for me. The community has

given me more than housing. The community has given me a place to continue growing, loving others, and using my gifts," Eliseo said. "I pray for people, I try to treat everyone like family, and I remain thankful for the peace and encouragement that this environment provides."

His perseverance, faith, and commitment to helping people demonstrate that even in the face of profound physical challenges, a life rooted in dignity, purpose, and community can continue to flourish. With the stability of affordable housing and the support of a dedicated care team, Eliseo continues to pursue education, writing, and encouraging others through faith and perseverance.

Eliseo's journey reflects the profound impact that safe, supportive housing can have, empowering residents not only to live with dignity but also to continue sharing their talents, wisdom, and hope with the world. ■



A Mother's Silence to Strength: Janeet's Journey to Confidence Through English

At home, Janeet knew exactly what she wanted to say, but the words often felt trapped once she stepped outside her door. As a mother from Mexico raising her children in a new language, everyday moments came with quiet anxiety, from school conversations to medical appointments, where understanding and being understood felt just out of reach.

That changed in July 2025, when Janeet enrolled in Catholic **Charities Brooklyn and Queens' ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Program**, taking her first step toward learning English and reclaiming her confidence, voice, and connection to the world around her.

When Janeet learned that her daughter was ill, she was overwhelmed by a mix of fear, sadness, and responsibility. The reality of navigating doctors' visits

and medical information in a language she did not fully understand left her feeling anxious and uncertain.

Determined to do everything she could for her daughter, Janeet realized that asking for help was not a weakness, but a necessary step toward protecting her child's health.

To help improve her ability to learn about her daughter's needs, Janeet sought out Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' ESOL Program for the free literacy courses. For the past eight months, Janeet has been attending two ESOL courses a week, in hopes of advocating more effectively for her daughter's treatment and overall well-being.

With consistency and dedication, and with the help of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' ESOL instructors, Janeet has significantly improved her English skills.

she loves.

Thanks to the supportive environment and engaging lessons, Janeet has been encouraged to interact with classmates, share her thoughts, and participate in discussions. The Catholic Charities' ESOL Program helps participants thrive in their communities by meeting their communication, academic, work, health, and other literacy goals.

Janeet now feels heard and valued by those around her. This change in her life was a significant moment for her, as she realized that learning English was not just about acquiring a new skill, but also about reclaiming her voice.

Not only has the ESOL program helped Janeet build her confidence, but it has also transformed her ability to speak up for herself and those she loves.

What began as a necessity has become a source of confidence and independence, allowing Janeet to navigate everyday challenges, advocate for her family, and engage more deeply with her community.

Through Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' ESOL Program, participants are given the tools to learn and be heard so they can transform their lives in meaningful and lasting ways. Janeet's journey shows that gaining a voice in a new language opens doors to dignity, independence, and a brighter future for families and their communities. ■



Janeet recently went to the pharmacy to pick up her daughter's medication. Before leaving, she read the label and realized that it was the wrong prescription. Janeet returned to the pharmacist and told them of the mistake.

Janeet shared her experience at the pharmacy with her ESOL instructor, noting how proud she felt to be able to communicate the need for the right medicine. Not only has the ESOL program helped Janeet build her confidence, but it has also transformed her ability to speak up for herself and those



Being in a supportive and interactive environment gives Denise a sense of independence and gives her caregiver and family respite. Knowing that Denise is receiving attentive care from reliable staff is a great feeling for her daughter.

Support, Connection, and Respite for the Longhorn Family: Social Adult Day Program for Older Adults Diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease can be both deeply meaningful and profoundly challenging. Families have to balance medical needs, safety concerns, and the emotional weight of watching someone they love change over time. To help seniors with Alzheimer's and their caregivers, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens offers the **Alzheimer's Social Adult Day Program**, a social adult day program for older adults Diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease.

The Alzheimer's Adult Day Program serves those ages 60 and over who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's or related dementia. Clients and their caregivers receive five hours of respite, case management, supportive counseling, group activities, caregiver support groups, training workshops, information, and referral services.

Queens resident Denise Longhorn has been enrolled in the Social Adult Day Program since February 2024. Denise is a mother of five children and worked for the Board of Education as a cook for

15 years before retiring due to her 2022 Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Denise's daughter, Sharice Longhorn, took on the role of Denise's primary caregiver. Sharice was working two jobs at the time of her mother's diagnosis and eventually had to quit her second job to tend to her mother's needs. "It was challenging. At the time of her diagnosis, we had to be very cautious. She would leave the house or take the keys. It was hard to explain that she could not leave the house alone or understand what was happening," Sharice said.

Prior to finding the Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Social Adult Day Program, Denise was attending a different day program that didn't meet her and her family's needs. After doing some research, Sharice's sister found the Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Social Adult Day Program.

"She's more comfortable, and she's happier at the Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens program," Sharice said. "It's been beneficial for all of us."

Denise attends the Social Adult Day Program Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Denise participates in arts and crafts, exercise and dance classes, movie screenings, and holiday parties.

Being in a supportive and interactive environment gives Denise a sense of independence and provides her caregiver and family with respite. Knowing that Denise is receiving attentive care from reliable staff is a great feeling for her daughter Sharice.

"The staff calls me whenever there is something that my mother needs or if they have an issue they are concerned about. It's reassuring," Sharice said.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Social Adult Day provides structured activities, social connection, and care in a safe, supportive environment. While participants engage in enriching programs designed to promote dignity and quality of life, caregivers gain something equally vital: time to rest, work, or simply recharge, knowing their loved one is in capable and caring hands. ■



Age Is No Barrier to Service: Clyde Rhymes Inspires Through 23 Years of Volunteering

Clyde Rhymes has volunteered with Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Food Pantry Network for 23 years, dedicated to helping neighbors in need.

At 95 years old, Clyde volunteers almost every day at the St. Benedict the Moor Food Pantry in Jamaica, Queens. He works every aspect of the food pantry, whether it is making sure the truck backs in properly, helping to sort the food items, carting and carrying, or replenishing.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Food Resource Services manages a network of 20 food pantries in partnership with parishes throughout the Diocese of Brooklyn, plus 40 additional parish-based sites. Together, they help distribute over 4 million meals each year to more than 270,000 people, providing shelf-stable foods, dairy, meats, and fresh produce.

Volunteers like Clyde are hard to find and are the backbone of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' food pantry operations. His dedication and

commitment inspires everyone around him and strengthens our community.

"It is instilled in my DNA to do things the right way," Clyde said. "I see people need help, so I try to do my best."

**"It is instilled in my DNA
to do things the right way.
I see people need help, so
I try to do my best."
- Clyde Rhymes**

Clyde is a shining example of compassion, faith, and unwavering commitment to helping others. For more than two decades, he has generously given his time and heart to serving our community, welcoming every person with kindness, dignity, and warmth.

At 95, Clyde brings a unique touch to helping people at the pantry. If someone needs extra help or advice, he looks for ways to make things easier, whether it's moving boxes, greeting new faces, or finding better ways to

keep the pantry running smoothly.

Clyde's presence reminds us that service has no age limit and that one person's dedication can make a lasting impact on countless lives.

In the first week of March, the Community Outreach Services team came together to honor Clyde for two extraordinary achievements: his 95th birthday and 23 years of selfless volunteer service with the St. Benedict the Moor Food Pantry. The staff surprised Clyde with cake and a heartfelt rendition of "Happy Birthday," filling the room with celebration and appreciation for all he has given.

"At 95 years young, Clyde continues to inspire us all with his generosity, humility, and love for his community. We are beyond grateful for his years of service and the legacy of kindness he continues to build every day," the Community Outreach Services team said. Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens extends a heartfelt thank you to Clyde for 23 amazing years of service and for being such a blessing to all of us. ■

Rhoda Finds a Second Home in Brooklyn: Catholic Charities Supports Independence for Older Adults

Through the 19 of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Older Adult Centers, funded by NYC Aging, Catholic Charities assists seniors in preserving their independence, continuing to enjoy a fruitful life, and accessing necessary support services.

Born in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in 1937, Rhoda Schepps has lived there her whole life. In 1961, she and her family settled in Bensonhurst, where she lived in the same building for over 67 years. Rhoda dedicated her life to raising her children, and she worked at a supermarket for 25 years. After her career at the supermarket, she served as a caretaker for the elderly and neglected children at the Angel Guardian Home.

With Rhoda's children grown and retired, she found herself spending more time at home until she joined the Catholic Charities Narrows Older Adult Center in Brooklyn.

"I never imagined myself going to a senior center until I met the **Narrows Older Adult Center** Program Manager Tselita McBride, who is also my neighbor," Rhoda said. "With some gentle convincing, Tselita encouraged me to attend the center, even if just once, to see if I would like it."

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Older Adult Centers offer a range of activities and services, including lunch, social services, educational workshops, exercise classes, discussion groups, games, art classes, lectures, health screenings, organized outings, special events,

and parties.

"I joined the Narrows in 2018 and haven't stopped attending since," Rhoda said. "This place has become my second home, and the members are my second family. It's a wonderfully welcoming environment with staff who are always lending a helping hand."

In addition to providing a social and supportive environment, Catholic Charities Older Adult Centers have staff who can assist seniors and their families in accessing services such as guidance on Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, housing, transportation, and more. The center provides a variety of health and educational seminars to help keep older adults informed about available

resources.

"The Narrows makes me happy, and I look forward to coming here for as long as I can," Rhoda said.

For seniors like Rhoda, the Narrows Older Adult Center provides a community where friendships flourish, independence is strengthened, and every stage of life is valued. Through its network of centers, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens continues to ensure that older adults across Brooklyn and Queens have access to the support, resources, and companionship they need to live with dignity, purpose, and joy. ■



“Since coming to Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, I have become a better version of myself. I think I shine a little bit,”
- Carmen Swann



Rebuilding After Loss: Carmen's Journey to Healing and Stability

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Behavioral Health Center helps individuals navigate the complex social services system while closely monitoring each case to ensure people receive the support they need.

Carmen Patricia Swann has been a client at Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Clinics since 2023. After her husband passed in 2020, Carmen found herself deep in grief, managing an eviction notice, and unemployed due to a medical issue from injuries she sustained while working.

Carmen's situation contributed to severe stress and symptoms of anxiety and depression. She discovered **Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Behavioral Health Clinic** and decided to seek help in managing the stress in her life.

The Behavioral Health Services team works to ease the stress that can accompany mental health challenges, housing instability, difficult family circumstances, and limited access to essential resources. Guided by a holistic approach to care, the program emphasizes wellness, recovery,

trauma-informed practices, and the integration of physical and behavioral health services to support long-term stability and well-being.

At Catholic Charities, Carmen began working with a therapist to treat her depressive symptoms and was immediately connected with Behavioral Health Services' psychiatric medication management services, peer services, and case management services.

"The Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Corona Behavioral Health Center is a very well-organized facility with highly professional people who help me," Carmen said.

Carmen's participation in therapy services and medication management has made her symptoms of depression and anxiety more manageable.

The supportive environment at the Corona Behavioral Health Clinic is evident through the connections the team makes with its clients. During a recent medical emergency at the clinic, team members escorted Carmen to the hospital to help manage her physical health.

The Behavioral Health Services peer team has provided support to Carmen in both individual peer services and by helping her secure additional supports and connections through a peer-led group at the clinic.

In peer groups, a Senior Peer Specialist discusses topics that offer a refreshing take on improving their quality of life.

"I run a philosophy group that Carmen is in, and we don't think about our problems; we think about a profound meaning of life," explained Carlos Guerra, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Neighborhood Services Senior Peer Specialist.

Carmen described the group as feeling like college, inspiring her to think about things from a different perspective.

In addition to the services Catholic Charities' Behavioral Health Clinic offers, the clinic team has connected Carmen with Targeted Case Management (TCM) Services. TCM Services connect clients with other Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens programs and services that they can utilize. The TCM Team helped Carmen gain housing and rent support.

"Since coming to Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens, I have become a better version of myself. I think I shine a little bit," Carmen said.

Carmen's journey at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens reflects the impact compassionate, coordinated care can have during life's most difficult moments. With the support of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Behavioral Health Services team, she has been able to stabilize her mental health, connect with essential resources, and rediscover a sense of purpose and hope.

For individuals facing similar challenges, the Behavioral Health Center remains a place where healing, support, and a path forward are always within reach. ■

Adnan's Bright Future: How Catholic Charities Early Childhood Programs Empower Families

For families seeking a strong foundation for their children's future, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens offers comprehensive Early Childhood Development Services designed to nurture the whole child.

Located at eight sites throughout the boroughs, **Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Early Childhood Development Centers** provide free Early Head Start and Head Start services to low-income families to help children prepare for and thrive in a school environment. Through high-quality programs rooted in compassion and community, the Early Childhood Development Centers support cognitive growth, social and emotional well-being, language and literacy skills, and physical development during the most critical years of life.

Parents Seema Begum and Kamrul Hassan enrolled their four-and-a-half-year-old, Adnan, in the Colin-Newell Early Childhood Development Center after noticing he struggled significantly with speech and language.

"Adnan could not clearly express his needs, and it was often heartbreaking to see him become frustrated when others did not understand him," Seema said.

In addition to his speech delays, Seema also noticed her son experienced cognitive challenges that made learning and completing simple tasks very difficult for him.

"I often compared him to other children his age and wondered if he would ever



be able to communicate confidently or do things independently," Seema said. "As a family, we felt overwhelmed and unsure of how to best support him."

At Colin-Newell Early Childhood Development Center in Jamaica, Queens, Adnan and other students participate in a variety of developmentally appropriate activities through the Montessori approach. By combining compassionate care, individualized instruction, and strong family partnerships, these centers help children build the skills and confidence they need to succeed in school and in life.

Now that Adnan has been attending the program, his parents have seen him expand his vocabulary and improve his sentence formation. The frustration Seema and Kamrul once saw began to fade as Adnan found his voice.

"Adnan is independent in meeting his personal needs; something we once feared would take much longer to achieve," Seema said. "He communicates effectively with both peers and adults. He is recognizing and reciting sight words and can proudly write his name on his own."

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Early Childhood Development Centers also help families connect with additional services and navigate available programs. The staff at Colin-

Newell supports Seema at school district meetings to advocate for her son's needs and has provided a space for service providers to work with Adnan.

"The transformation has been incredible to witness. What once felt like uncertainty has turned into hope and pride," Seema said. "As a mother, I am beyond grateful for the support, encouragement, and services that helped my son grow developmentally and build the confidence he carries today."

By creating safe, engaging, and enriching learning environments, Early Childhood Development Services empower young children to thrive in school and beyond while providing families with the guidance and support they need.

"This journey has shown our family that with the right support, patience, and belief in a child's potential, amazing progress is possible," Seema said.

For families like Seema and Kamrul's, the impact of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Early Childhood Development Services extends far beyond the classroom. As Adnan's journey shows, with the right support during the earliest years, challenges can become milestones, uncertainty can give way to hope, and every child can reach their full potential. ■

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