

CARITAS NOW

CATHOLIC CHARITIES BROOKLYN AND QUEENS MAGAZINE | BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES ISSUE

125+

YEARS OF CHANGING LIVES



The Knights of Columbus
Join Catholic Charities
Brooklyn and Queens in
November to Provide Relief
to Furloughed Workers



*Strong Families,
Brighter Holidays*

LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

As we welcome the Winter 2025 issue of "Caritas Now," I want to thank you for the generosity and compassion that define our Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens community. This issue highlights how we make the holidays meaningful for families by providing food, support, hope, and warmth.

In these pages, you'll see how your support brings Thanksgiving and Christmas meals to families, helps children and parents build strong foundations, and keeps our food programs available when needed. You'll also meet Jessica Blanding, whose success story inspires us, and learn about partnerships helping feed families. From mental health support to the joy of jazz, each story reflects the spirit of compassion that unites us.

I encourage you to make a difference this season by choosing how you'd like to contribute: donate financially, volunteer your time, consider leaving a legacy gift, or purchase from our Amazon Wishlist using the QR code provided. Each action directly helps families in need and strengthens our community.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission and for joining us in serving those who need us most. Together, we are not only changing lives but also building a future rooted in compassion, justice, and hope for Brooklyn and Queens. Your commitment ensures that the legacy of caring endures for generations to come.

May the peace and joy of Christ fill your hearts this winter, and may God bless you and your loved ones throughout the season.

With sincere appreciation



Reverend Monsignor Alfred LoPinto
President and CEO





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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 \$15 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

Making the Holidays Count

Providing support to families for Thanksgiving and Christmas

The holidays are just one season in our year-round commitment to families-- but they're a powerful reminder of what's possible when communities come together.

Every year, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens partners with community organizations, parishes and generous supporters to ensure local families have the food, gifts and support they need to celebrate with dignity and to make the holidays magical.

At our 2025 Turkey Distribution mid-November, Catholic Charities distributed 4,000 turkeys to parish families throughout Brooklyn and Queens. An additional 5,800 chickens and turkeys were provided through our in-network food pantries. Where possible, we also gave food vouchers to help families with extra holiday meal expenses. Thanks to the incredible support from the Knights of Columbus, the Carpenters Union, Al and Maria Catanese, EJ Electric Installation Co., Univision, as well as dozens corporate partners, nearly 10,000 families were able to enjoy a warm Thanksgiving meal. The community truly came together to ensure families could celebrate the holiday and not go hungry.

Santa's Toy Shop at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens is now collecting new, unwrapped gifts for children in our area. This program allows families to come to various locations and choose toys in a way that feels joyful and dignified. Volunteers dress up as elves to help parents pick out toys that fit their children's ages. We also provide gift cards to parents, thanks to money raised at our annual Evenin of Jazz and Cocktails events. Santa's Toy Shop is here to make sure every child in our community can open a present during the holidays, no matter their family's situation.

Last year, Santa's Toy Shop gave toys to more than 2,000 parents and caregivers so their children could have gifts to open on Christmas morning. You can still donate toys and help make the holidays special for more children. Visit our website at www.ccbq.org to learn how to give.

Every gift—whether it's a turkey, a toy, or a donation—means more than just charity. It shows that we are a community. It tells families in need: you are seen, you are valued, and you belong.

As this year ends and we look ahead, we are thankful for partners like you who make our work possible. Together, we are not just helping families get by; we are helping them build strong, healthy, and full lives. ■







Always there When Families Need Us

From everyday support to emergency relief, our food programs help families year-round.

As the cost of everything from groceries to toiletries continues to rise, families across Brooklyn and Queens are facing food insecurity. Parents juggle limited budgets, rising food costs, and unpredictable work schedules as they struggle to provide consistent, nutritious meals. The impact extends beyond the dinner table, touching children's health, academic performance, and emotional well-being, while placing tremendous stress on caregivers.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens operates an extensive food assistance program designed to support families through both everyday challenges and unexpected crises. Our network of over 60 food pantries works alongside pop-up food distributions, nutrition events, educational workshops, and home-delivered meals for homebound seniors to ensure no one in our community goes hungry.

Meeting Families Where They Are

To ensure families have access to healthy meals and nutrition education, Catholic Charities offers

programs including the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The WIC Program assists low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutrition and breastfeeding support, education, and access to healthy foods.

SNAP provides electronic benefits that can be used like cash to purchase food—helping low-income working people, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and others feed their families with bread and cereals, fruits and vegetables, meats, fish and dairy products.

When Crisis Strikes: The Cruz Family's Story

When Mrs. Cruz's husband suffered a sudden medical emergency requiring extensive rehabilitation, she became solely responsible for caring for him and their young child. While navigating their new reality, Mrs. Cruz reached out to Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens for support.

The Catholic Charities Community Outreach Services team expedited the Cruz family's SNAP application to ensure they could afford fresh, healthy food during this difficult time.

"With rising medical costs and a reduced household income, affording nutritious food became a major concern," said Mrs. Cruz. "[The Catholic Charities team] took the time to understand our situation, showing empathy, patience, and an unwavering commitment to helping us through this incredibly difficult period."

Responding to Community Emergencies

The Community Outreach Services team's ability to respond quickly to families and communities is evident throughout their work. This fall, the team hosted an emergency food pantry for furloughed federal workers affected by the government shutdown.

"Federal workers were struggling during the government shutdown; they didn't get a paycheck and didn't know when they would get another one. We decided to step in and at least bring food and food vouchers to help them," said Debbie Hampson, Senior Director of Community and Mobile Outreach



Services at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens.

Over 150 federal workers came to the pantry to receive fresh produce and shelf-stable items. Employees from the TSA, Social Security offices, and Parks Department received bags of groceries, \$50 food vouchers, and information on other helpful Catholic Charities services.

A Lifeline, Always

In the face of rising costs and growing uncertainty, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens continues to stand as a lifeline for families who need support—whether they're facing a sudden crisis or

navigating the ongoing challenges of making ends meet. Through food pantries, nutrition programs like WIC and SNAP, and emergency outreach, we respond with compassion and speed while preserving the dignity and well-being of every neighbor.

Stories like the Cruz family's remind us that no one has to struggle alone. By ensuring access to healthy meals and essential support, we help create a community where children can thrive, parents can breathe easier, and families can look toward the future with renewed strength. ■



Jessica Blanding shares her inspiring story to 1,000+ at our gala this fall.

Nurturing the Next Generation

Building strong foundations for families, one child at a time.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens is doing far more than offering childcare and education—it's building foundations that keep families strong, healthy, and whole.

Through Catholic Charities Early Head Start Services, Head Start Services, and Early Childhood Centers, the organization creates nurturing spaces where young children can learn, explore, and grow. But the impact doesn't stop

at the classroom door. Parents are welcomed as partners, invited into the centers to connect with their children and play an active role in their child's earliest and most important stages of development.

Early Learning That Transforms Families

Our Early Childhood Services serve children from birth to 5 years old, with our Early Head Start Program serving infants to children aged two, and our Head Start Program serving children aged 3 to 5 and transitioning them into

elementary school. The programs ensure children are ready for school by providing developmentally appropriate activities that promote cognitive, social, emotional, language-literacy, and physical development.

But when we invest in a child's early years, we invest in their entire family's future.

Jessica Blanding, a Brooklyn native, enrolled her son Jamie in the Early Head Start Pro-gram at the Thomas A. DeStefano Early Childhood Development Center in 2022. With Jamie receiving quality

care and education, Jessica had the time to focus on completing her bachelor's degree in psychology.

As Jessica became involved as co-chair of the parent committee, volunteered in class-rooms, and donated resources, she discovered a passion for social work. The support she received inspired Jessica to pursue a Master's in Social Work. She worked with her assigned Family Service Coordinator to apply to Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens for her practicum.

"That experience has had a lasting impact on my growth and continues to support my success in my Social Work journey," said Jessica. "The Thomas A. DeStefano Developmental Center not only provided Jamie with a strong educational foundation but also offered me the support and encouragement I needed to grow academically and professionally."

Supporting Families at Every Stage

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens creates programs with the entire family in mind—because strong children need strong parents, and strong parents need support. Other offerings, such as the Center for Pregnant Women and the Mobility Mentoring Program, help strengthen and empower parents to lead successful families.

Even before a child is born, Catholic Charities supports families through The Center for Pregnant Women. The center provides limited financial assistance, case management services, baby items, information, and referrals to additional Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens programs and



Thomas DeStefano staff and parents celebrating the completion of educational nutrition program for parents and staff

community resources.

To help parents thrive in their careers and keep their families stable, the Mobility Mentoring Program provides families with the services needed to achieve their personal aspirations. Mentors assist with the challenges of parenting by engaging in a participant-directed partnership designed to optimize family strengths, focusing on finances, family stability, well-being, education, training, and employment.

Lifting the Whole Family

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens demonstrates that early childhood education is most powerful when it lifts the whole family. By nurturing children,

empowering parents, and building strong community connections, our programs create lasting foundations that support growth long after a child leaves the classroom.

Families like the Blandings are proof that when parents are supported and children are given a safe, stimulating place to learn, entire futures can change. Through Early Childhood Services, the Center for Pregnant Women, and the Mobility Mentoring Program, Catholic Charities continues to invest in the success, stability, and well-being of every family we serve. ■

Healing Together: Mental Health Matters

When one family member heals, the whole family grows stronger.

Mental health challenges don't exist in isolation—they ripple through entire families. A parent struggling with depression may find it harder to engage with their children. A young mother overwhelmed by anxiety may feel unable to ask for help. Stress, communication breakdowns, and emotional strain can make it difficult for families to function, let alone thrive.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens recognizes that treating mental health is essential for building stronger, healthier families. Our comprehensive Behavioral Health Services support not only individuals in crisis but also the families who rely on them—because when one person heals, everyone benefits.

More Than Just Treatment

Navigating the social services system alone can feel confusing and overwhelming, especially during a mental health crisis. Coordinating care, accessing resources, and keeping up with ongoing needs often add stress at a time when

people are already vulnerable. Catholic Charities steps in as a compassionate guide, helping clients understand their options and ensuring they receive timely, holistic assistance.

Whether someone is coping with mental health issues, housing instability, family challenges, or barriers to essential services, Catholic Charities offers the support, structure, and care needed to restore stability—not just for individuals, but for their entire family system.

Vanessa's Journey: From Crisis to Confidence

Three years ago, 22-year-old Vanessa Wyatt found herself at the Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Clinic in Corona seeking help. She was expecting her first child, had unstable housing, and struggled with low self-esteem. Feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, Vanessa's mental health declined, leading to a brief hospital stay.

She knew she needed to get better—not just for herself, but for the child she was about to bring into

the world.

At the Catholic Charities Clinic, Vanessa was assigned a therapist, a nurse, and a case manager to help her get on the right track.

"At Catholic Charities, they really believe it takes a whole team to help someone recover. It wasn't just one person who helped me; I suddenly had a whole team on my side," said Vanessa.

Vanessa's therapist taught her better ways to cope, helped her change her perspective, and worked to build her confidence and embrace her strengths. Her nurse ensured she wasn't neglecting her physical health, and the case manager helped Vanessa find stable housing and prepare for work.

"Now, at 26, I can honestly say my mental health is more stable than it's ever been. I've kept my job for almost a year and just got promoted. I'm getting married next year, and for the first time, I look forward to the future and what it holds for me," said Vanessa. "Catholic Charities prepared me to battle my depression and the never-



Vanessa (left) and her counselor Claire at the Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Clinic in Jackson Heights, Queens

ending obstacles that life throws at me.”

Today, Vanessa is not only thriving—she’s building the stable, loving family life she once thought was impossible.

Strengthening Families Through Healing

By addressing mental health with dignity and expertise, Catholic Charities doesn’t just help individuals heal—we help families reconnect, rebuild resilience, and move forward together. When parents receive mental health support, they’re better able to care for their children. When young mothers like Vanessa find stability, their children grow up in healthier, safer homes.

Mental health care isn’t separate from family services—it’s foundational to them. Because strong families need emotionally healthy members, and emotional health requires compassionate, comprehensive support. ■



Jazz and Generosity

On Wednesday, November 19, 2025, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens hosted An Evening of Jazz and Cocktails, an annual event that benefits children and families in need during the Christmas season.

Thanks to the support from those in attendance, Catholic Charities raised thousands of dollars to make this Christmas magical for families in need. Monies will be used to help fund our Santa’s Toy Shops hosted in Brooklyn and Queens, where parents ‘shop’ for gifts for their children and teens at no cost.

Parents and caregivers have the unique opportunity to choose age-appropriate gifts for their children from our extensive selection of toys. Shopper Elves, volunteers dressed as elves, are available to assist families in selecting the perfect gifts.

The dedication and generosity of our supporters bring joy and hope to families and children across Brooklyn and Queens this holiday season. ■



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CHRISTMAS TOY DRIVE

This holiday season, join us in spreading Christmas joy to families in need. CCBQ is collecting new toys for children (ages 0–17) and gift cards for teens for our annual Santa's Toy Shops, happening on December 10–11 and 18–19, 2025.



Scan to shop!
 Or visit www.ccbq.org/give