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CARITAS NOW

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



They Came for Help, They Found So Much More: Inside the Creative Programs Changing Lives at CCBQ

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

As I enter the retirement phase of my life I want to thank all for your continued support of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens. It has been a great privilege to have served as Vicar for Human Services, Diocese of Brooklyn and as President and CEO of Catholic Charities and its affiliate corporations. I will continue to pray for you and your families and pray for the continued success of Catholic Charities in being the visible sign of Jesus' mercy and love at work in the lives our sisters and brothers, young and old.

On July 1, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens welcomes Very Reverend Patrick J. Keating, Esq. as our new President and CEO. Fr. Keating has served the agency since 2011, most recently as Deputy Chief Executive Officer, working closely with me to advance the Diocese of Brooklyn's human services mission across Brooklyn and Queens.

A native of Sunnyside, Queens, Fr. Keating attended Archbishop Molloy High School and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Brooklyn in 2005. He brings broad preparation to this role: a law degree from Brooklyn Law School, a graduate degree in business and public administration from Baruch College, and a Master of Divinity from the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception. He also serves as the Diocese's Econome, Vicar for Financial Administration, and Moderator of the Curia. Fr. Keating is familiar with our 160 programs and services. He showed strong leadership in 2020, guiding the agency as interim CFO through pandemic operational challenges to ensure uninterrupted support for those in need.

I leave with a full heart, confident that Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens and affiliate agencies are in good hands. He knows this organization, understands the dire needs of our communities, and is well prepared. The work will remain the same: meeting our neighbors in need where they are, with compassion and without condition. Today, we are proud of the diverse programming we offer to enhance the lives of those we serve. In this issue, you will see how our older adult centers provide engaging activities and social opportunities to help older adults live with dignity and connection. For early childhood programs, we offer family support services and programs to help fathers become more involved and connected. We also continue to expand our mental health services, offering art programs that provide supportive care for those facing emotional and psychological challenges. Every initiative is designed to help our neighbors thrive. Your partnership makes this possible, and we hope you will join us in welcoming Fr. Keating to this new chapter of the mission.

We look forward to sharing more in this summer issue of Caritas Now.

With gratitude,

Rev. Msgr. Alfred LoPinto
President & CEO (Retired)
Catholic Charities and Affiliated Agencies











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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 $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



The Improv Class at St. Charles Jubilee Older Adult Center meets every other Tuesday. Led by volunteer, Stanley Zareff.

Aging Gracefully, Improvising Wildly

At the St. Charles Jubilee Older Adult Center in Brooklyn Heights, Seniors are Finding Joy, Confidence and Connection through Improv

At the St. Charles Jubilee Older Adult Center, located in Brooklyn Heights, seniors stay physically and mentally active through improv classes. For over two years, seniors have been gathering every other Tuesday for a two-hour improv class hosted by Stanley Zareff.

Stanley, who was raised in Dallas, Texas, has lived in Brooklyn for over 55 years and has taught various acting classes in New York City. For the past two years, Stanley has been volunteering at St. Charles Jubilee Older Adult Center, teaching Improv Classes to seniors.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Older Adult Centers, funded by NYC Aging, 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.

At a senior luncheon, Stanley was approached by an attendee of the St. Charles Jubilee Older Adult Center, who asked him to host a class there. After discussing the idea with program staff, Stanley began hosting a two-hour improv class for seniors twice a month.

"Classes begin with relaxation and breathing warm-up, before everyone gets up to dance," Stanley said.

"Dancing is the easiest and most fun part for them, as long as they have their walker or cane."
After warming up, the class does some improv exercises, the most famous being 'Yes, and...', in which two or more people are in a scene together, accepting each other's reality and building on it by adding new information.

"Then I have them divide them into groups of two or three," Stanley said. "I usually have some scripts where they will get together and read through them. But many times, we'll have them read through the scene, and that's what I call a cold reading."

Improv Classes, like Stanley's, can help older adults keep their minds active by combining several forms of mental exercise. For example, remembering lines, cues, and character details helps improve memory. Getting up in front of your peers helps foster confidence, and watching performances helps exercise attention and concentration.

"I'm dealing with cognitive, emotional, and mental stimulation," Stanley said. "I'm impressed with the level of trust that they have in me."

In addition to the mental exercise emphasized in improv activities, seniors also benefit from physical exercise in the Improv Class through dance warm-ups and scene acting.

With an average of 30 seniors who regularly attend the improv class, it has quickly become one of the most popular programs offered at St. Charles Jubilee. The group has a wide range of ages and experience, from former cabaret performers to Holocaust survivors.

"It's not about the meals; this is more of a social place for them. It's about the fun," Stanley said.

No matter the weather, Stanley says, even in the dead of winter, seniors take their canes or walkers and make their way to the St. Charles Jubilee Center for class. Class attendees are not only working on cognitive skills, staying physically active, and making friends, but also genuinely improving their acting skills and confidence. Stanley has encouraged the seniors he's working with to enter local talent shows and even participate in filming commercials.



The improv students at St. Charles Jubilee Older Adult Center working on an improv exercise together.

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Older Adult Centers help seniors maintain independence and enjoy meaningful lives. At St. Charles Jubilee, participants strengthen both mind and body while building friendships and confidence through laughter, movement, and creativity.

Stanley's dedication and the group's enthusiasm show it's never too late to learn, connect, and grow. ■

Healing Through Creativity: Inside an Art Therapy Group: Art Offers a Path to Healing For Those Navigating Health Challenges





The participants in the **Coping Through Art** *group at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Corona Behavioral Health Center share their art with each other.*

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Behavioral Health Services focus on rebuilding lives and compassionately serving those struggling with mental illness and substance use disorders. The clinics offer Personalized Recovery-Oriented Services (PROS), where adults pursue and maintain meaningful life goals through group and individual work.

At the Catholic Charities Behavioral Health Clinic in Corona, Queens, the PROS program hosts a variety of groups for clients to find support, connections, and encouragement with others who share similar challenges or goals. One of the most popular groups is the Coping Through Art Group, where clients get together to creatively express their emotions.

Individuals who receive Behavioral Health Services are eligible for Coping Through Art. In particular, those struggling with anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, and bipolar disorder can attend.

The art therapy group helps participants communicate feelings that are hard to express, explore emotions safely, reduce stress, and connect with others through the shared creative process. Lillian Prado, a Social Worker at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Behavioral Health Services, hosts the art therapy group weekly.

"I think it's good for people to de-stress through drawing or painting," Lillian said. The group follows a curriculum exploring ways to process emotions through discussion, art, and music. This welcoming environment reminds clients they are not alone and that help is available through community, compassion, and creative expression.

In a recent session, clients were asked to pick a color representing their feelings that day and draw a picture using only that color. After expressing their creativity, Lillian asks each client to share their color choice and explain the feelings behind it.

"Activities are different every week. It's combining art and emotional expression," Lillian said.

By combining creativity with emotional support, the program helps participants build confidence, process difficult feelings, and strengthen their recovery journey.

For example, at another recent meeting, Lillian encouraged clients to make posters with positive affirmations and pictures depicting things that bring joy and comfort. Clients write phrases such as "When one door shuts, another door opens" or select inspiring lines from the Bible. Their posters feature drawings of family members, good weather, delicious food, and fictional characters.

"When the group draws, I usually play some music too. Those songs evoke feelings in people and inspire their art or conversations," Lillian said.

Through groups like Coping Through Art, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' Behavioral Health Services continues to provide clients with opportunities for healing, self-expression, and connection, demonstrating the program's integral role in the recovery journey.■



A father and daughter celebrating Earth Day with arts and crafts at Sunset Park Early Childhood Development Center.

Building Stronger Bonds: Early Childhood Programs Promote Male Involvement in Child Development

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Early Childhood Services offers free Early Head Start and Head Start services to low-income families with with infants, toddlers, and children up to 5 years old. In addition to helping prepare children for school with high-quality programs, comprehensive services for expectant mothers and families, Early Childhood Services fosters strong family relationships through its Male Ambassador Program.

The Male Ambassador Program's goal is to promote male figures to actively engage in every aspect of children's lives. Originally, the program catered specifically to fathers, but recognizing that families come in many forms, including those led by single mothers or where a father may not be present, the programs are now designed to welcome all supportive male ambassadors, such as fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, cousins, or close family friends.

"When we changed it to male ambassadors so the program can be inclusive of all male figures in a child's life, the program received more activity and participation from males in the schools and helped with the children," Vern Jinks, ECS Administrative Specialist/ Male Involvement Specialist, said.

The Male Ambassador Program hosts a variety of events throughout the year. Program events can center on holidays, such as a recent Earth Day Crafting event, the current school curriculum, or even school drop-offs.

"Once a month, we encourage the male ambassadors to drop their child off at school. We give them t-shirts to wear, and they take photos outside of the school with their child," Vern said. "It just makes the day more exciting for the children."

Events are based on the school's curriculum with a focus on the month's theme When classes focus on reading, male ambassadors are encouraged to visit the school and volunteer to read a story to their child's class.

ALL schools and Family Child Care Providers host specialized events, such as a Subway Series Cookout at one location. Male ambassadors and their children come dressed in Mets or Yankees garb and gather for fun and food.

The Catholic Charities Early Childhood Services division has noticed that promoting more male role model involvement has encouraged participation in more than just the fun activities. These initiatives have also contributed to greater male representation on the Parent Policy Council, demonstrating a stronger commitment to leadership and program governance among fathers and other male caregivers."We have noticed that because of the males bringing in their children in the morning or being more involved, the children's behaviors have also changed," Vern said. "Because now they say they're proud that their male ambassador is dropping them off or participating in school activities."

In addition, the Male Ambassador Program is working to promote increased male involvement before a child is born. Working in tandem with the Circle of Life Program at the Catholic Charities Center for Pregnant Women and Families, the Male Involvement Program is exploring hosting baby showers for expecting fathers.

As the Male Ambassador Program continues to grow, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens Early Childhood Services remains committed to strengthening the bonds between children and the positive male figures in their lives.

By creating meaningful opportunities for engagement throughout a child's early years, the program helps build stronger families, boosts children's confidence, and reinforces the community support that is essential for lifelong success. ■



A father and daughter celebrating Dads Take Your Child To School Day at Thomas A. DeStefano Early Childhood Development Center.



A group of Volunteers and staff with the CCBQ Community Health and Wellness Team preparing to give out healthy food items at a community resource fair.





Earlier this month, Catholic Charities Health and Wellness team visited Goodwill Terrace in Astoria, Queens, to share tips on diabetes prevention, symptom care, and healthy eating. Attendees enjoyed portion control giveaways, gift cards, and a tasty spinach dip!

Nourishing Our Community: Free Nutrition Programs for All

Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens is committed to nourishing families across Brooklyn and Queens, not just by providing food, but by equipping community members with the knowledge and resources to make healthy choices. Through its Community Outreach Services and Health and Wellness programs, the agency offers free nutrition education, wellness resources, and food assistance to anyone who needs it.

Community Outreach Services operates 21 of 60 emergency food pantry programs, Mobile Outreach, health and wellness educational initiatives, and the Msgr. Joseph Pheiffer Resource Center. The Resource Center has the capacity to accept large donations of clothing, food, and assorted items, and is equipped with a loading dock, pallet jacks, and a walk-in freezer. Donated items are shared with all 60 food pantries and 160 programs and services.

Thanks to supporters and donors, especially the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation (MCHF), Community Outreach Services stocks its pantries with healthy, shelf-stable food as well as fresh produce including eggs, milk, chicken, fruits, and vegetables. The MCHF is the agency's primary supporter of this initiative, enabling us to provide nutritious items to community members through its Food Pantry and Health and Wellness programs.

In 2025, Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' parish-based food pantries distributed over 4 million meals across Brooklyn and Queens.

Through Catholic Charities' Health and Wellness Services, residents across Brooklyn and Queens can access free health workshops, support groups, vaccinations, and SNAP application assistance. Using mobile units, the Health and Wellness programs travel to public schools, community centers, senior housing, and more, offering community members a strong foundation for eating nutritiously on a budget.

At Catholic Charities' Health and Wellness events called, Live It Up: Stronger Together, the team hosts workshops and informational sessions such as Brain Foods and Rethink Your Drink, sharing recipes and tips for healthy meals and smoothies that boost energy and cognitive function. With ingredients from Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens' food pantries, individuals can learn how to incorporate the food and budget-friendly items they receive into healthy recipes for their families. At Live It Up: Stronger Together Health and Wellness events, participants also learn how to prepare affordable recipes using the food they receive.

The Community Outreach Team can be found at food pantries and resource fairs across Brooklyn and Queens, including Live It Up! Health and Wellness resource fairs. Last year, the team reached over 3,250 adults through 17 Community Health and Wellness Events.

In addition, the Catholic Charities WIC — Women, Infants, and Children's Nutrition Program — offers eligible participants food benefits for healthy foods, along with nutrition counseling, health education, farmer's market vouchers, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care and social services.■

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