Dear Friends,

Marketing experts say that when you are sharing the important accomplishments of your non-profit organization, you shouldn’t talk about internal successes—that people, in general, are not interested that you have a new website, but would rather hear what you are doing for the community.

Now, it just so happens that Catholic Charities does have a new website that we will be launching in the next month (follow us on social media to learn more!). This is a big accomplishment for us, as well as a few others in 2015:

- We assessed all our internal policies and procedures to ensure we are in line with national best practices;
- We implemented new board committees to help with mission alignment, fiscal responsibility and community engagement;
- And we conducted a complete analysis of our buildings to map out a five year plan for how to accommodate future growth in staffing.

These internal accomplishments, while sometimes mundane, help us to build a stronger, healthier organization, putting us on the launchpad for growth and opportunity. Already, we have begun to see results. Throughout this newsletter, you will see stories about growth and expansion in our programs. These changes allow us to give help and hope to even more people in Central Texas.

Many of you have worked alongside us, behind the scenes, to make these successes possible. We give thanks for you and all our supporters daily, because we truly could not do this work without your help.

As you explore the enclosed stories, celebrate how far we have come. Be inspired by where we are going next. This is an exciting time to be a part of Catholic Charities.

We are no longer on the launchpad—we are taking off!

Blessings,

Sara

Sara Ramirez
Executive Director
Healing Through Play

Watch a child color or play with building blocks and you will see growth and learning happening before your eyes. Play builds creativity, coordination and problem solving. But play can also lead to healing for children struggling with their emotions or overcoming trauma, such as abuse or neglect.

Catholic Charities uses a special method, called play therapy, to assess children for mental health needs, build coping skills and begin the healing process. Play therapy allows children to communicate, even when their language skills prohibit traditional counseling methods.

“If you watch play therapy in session, you might think it is truly random play.”

At just eight years old, Henry had regular anger outbursts at school and at home. He struggled to put into words the way he was feeling. In frustration, he began lashing out.

His parents knew he needed help to overcome his challenges so they reached out to Catholic Charities Counseling Services. Henry started weekly meetings with his counselor who helped him, and his parents, learn to cope. It wasn’t long before they had a solution — bubbles.

Bubbles are delicate and in order for them to come out of the wand properly, you must regulate your breathing and focus. Henry began to carry a bottle of bubbles in his pocket, and anytime he felt an outburst coming on, he would step outside and blow bubbles. He would then take some deep breaths and refocus his mind so he could have a calm conversation about his feelings. Because his parents took the step of bringing him to Catholic Charities, Henry’s overall wellbeing was greatly improved, and he was able to perform better at school.

The process is different for each child, says Liz Hatlestad, a counselor with Catholic Charities Counseling Services.

“If you watch play therapy in session, you might think it is truly random play,” says Liz. “But the child is communicating in every moment through his choice of toy, his method of play.”

A special room at Catholic Charities is dedicated to play therapy sessions. What looks like a room in any day care is actually a carefully curated workspace. Coloring books, dolls and doll houses, cars and trucks, butterfly nets, puzzles and games — these all can help a child communicate their feelings and needs.

Most importantly, the space is designed to be comfortable, welcoming and safe.

Catholic Charities is currently exploring program expansion opportunities to allow us to serve more children like Henry.
Financial Stability Expansion

On November 4, Michaela walked through our doors at Catholic Charities of Central Texas and signed in. When her appointment was set the week before, she felt a new sense of hope that she might be able to put her financial troubles behind her. The sole breadwinner for her family of three, Michaela worked two jobs in order to make ends meet, giving up valuable time with her family.

Michaela knew that she needed to be at home more when her teenage daughter was caught smoking marijuana with their neighbors. She quit one job in order to provide the presence that her daughter needed, but she could not earn enough in her current job to pay her bills so she applied for a payday loan to avoid eviction. Now with a loan with interest rates well above 200%, she called Catholic Charities looking for any help she could get.

Initially, Catholic Charities paid two months’ rent so the family would not become homeless. But our services did not end there. Michaela met with a case manager who helped her design a budget and weekly goals and coached her on how to change her spending habits and seek higher paying employment. Together, they worked to address the barriers to stability that Michaela faced.

One barrier remains—the payday loan. Our current programs are not equipped to help free Michaela from the loan. For her to achieve stability, she must be free of this burden. This barrier has led Catholic Charities on a journey to discover if we can do more.

Financial Stability Expansion

Catholic Charities Financial Stability aims to stabilize families through financial assistance, long-term case management, budgeting and goal setting. As with all our programs, we continually evaluate and analyze our service model to ensure that we are being effective. And while we are confident in our current program’s outcomes, we have to challenge our current thinking for the benefit of our families and society as a whole.

Financial Stability Expansion

Catholic Charities is excited to announce that we are embarking on the design of a Financial Stability program expansion. Together with the Mustard Seed men’s group, made up of members from St. John Neumann Catholic Parish in Austin, Catholic Charities formed a taskforce to explore the following questions:

- What are the barriers to financial stability that we are not addressing?
- How do we best focus our resources to bring lasting change for families?
- How can we sustainably expand Financial Stability services to all areas of our service region?

One Crisis Away

It is estimated that half of all Texans do not have the three months of savings necessary to weather a crisis like a job loss or large medical expense - they are one crisis away from poverty. This means that when a crisis does arise, many families borrow money from payday lenders, as they typically don't qualify for traditional banking systems. As a result of this loan and their inability to pay upwards of 200% interest rates, they become late on bills and risk eviction or foreclosure. One-time assistance for families experiencing situational poverty is often enough to bridge the gap so they can regain their stability and independence. But for those experiencing chronic poverty, like Michaela, it can seem impossible to reach long-term stability because they are focused on how to survive for today.

Eventually, Catholic Charities paid two months’ rent so the family would not become homeless. But our services did not end there. Michaela met with a case manager who helped her design a budget and weekly goals and coached her on how to change her spending habits and seek higher paying employment. Together, they worked to address the barriers to stability that Michaela faced.

One barrier remains—the payday loan. Our current programs are not equipped to help free Michaela from the loan. For her to achieve stability, she must be free of this burden. This barrier has led Catholic Charities on a journey to discover if we can do more.
We aim to have a final plan in the early part of 2016 and hope to roll out the pilot phase in FY 16-17.

Our initial plan incorporates four key components to address short and long-term barriers to financial stability, including one-time assistance, long-term case management, financial literacy classes and the exploration of alternative loan programs. We believe that by addressing all aspects of financial poverty, including upcoming and current liability, gaps in financial literacy and barriers to future opportunity, families will be able to achieve long-term financial stability.

**Data Driven**

A member of one of the largest social services networks in the United States, Catholic Charities embarks on this expansion with considerable experience and data to draw from. We conducted a national survey of Catholic Charities agencies to learn about similar programs around the country. Our taskforce is analyzing the survey to learn what has and has not worked. In addition, we have launched an internal survey of current and recent Catholic Charities clients to learn about individual barriers to service, such as transportation or childcare needs.

Our ambitious goal is to build a comprehensive and scalable program that can be used to eliminate poverty not only in Central Texas, but across the country.

During that November 4 appointment at Catholic Charities, Michaela began her journey toward stability. With goals set, a plan in place and someone to compassionately guide her through the process, she left with hope in her heart. The road for her family will not be easy, but she will continue to have help along that path. It is for families like Michaela’s that we work to make financial stability a reality and, one day, to end poverty for good.

Stay tuned for how you can be a part of this exciting expansion!
**Two events — One Cause**

The Celebrate Life and Creating Hope Luncheons support all of the important programs offered by Catholic Charities of Central Texas. These inspirational events includes live testimonials from families served by Catholic Charities as well as our vision for the future. The one hour event is free to attend.

Supporting the events is a key way you can help our local community. Your contributions enable us to help bring families out of poverty. At least 85 cents of every dollar goes directly to serving families in need. The luncheons are essential in filling the gap to provide the highest quality help to families and individuals in Central Texas.

**How you can get involved:**

- **Give a Leadership Gift**
  Leadership gifts can be in any amount and are used to inspire guests at the event to give generously.

- **Be a Table Captain**
  Fill a table with people you think should learn about our mission.

- **Join Us**
  Attend one of these events and see how it only takes ONE to restore hope in Central Texas!

We hope you will join us! 🎈

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**CC101**

Get to know Catholic Charities of Central Texas at one of our free bimonthly lunch-and-learn events. Enjoy a delicious lunch and take a tour of Catholic Charities. Contact Martha Jasse at martha-jasse@ccctx.org or (512) 651-6126 to learn more. [www.ccctx.org/get-to-know-catholic-charities](http://www.ccctx.org/get-to-know-catholic-charities)
Forgettable events in which Catholic Charities will be shared by those it has touched. Enjoy a complimentary lunch as you see that it only takes ONE to restore hope in Central Texas.

**5th Annual Celebrate Life Luncheon**

Noon - 1 p.m.
Wednesday, February 17, 2016
St. Thomas Aquinas Parish // College Station

For more information contact Allison Seibert at (979) 822-9340 or allison-seibert@ccctx.org.

www.ccctx.org/CelebrateLife2016

**10th Annual Creating Hope Luncheon**

Noon - 1 p.m.
Thursday, April 14, 2016
Hyatt Regency // Austin

For more information contact Kristen Erdem at (512) 651-6132 or kristen-erdem@ccctx.org.

www.ccctx.org/CreatingHope2016

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**CC101**

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www.ccctx.org/get-to-know-catholic-charities

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**Austin**

January 6, 20  
February 3, 24  
March 9, 23  
April 6, 20  
May 4, 18  
June 1, 15  
July 6, 20  
August 3, 17  
September 7, 21  
October 5, 19  
November 2, 16  
December 7, 21

**Brazos Valley**

January 7, 21  
February 4, 25  
March 10, 24  
April 7, 21  
May 5, 19  
June 2, 16  
July 7, 21  
August 4, 18  
September 8, 22  
October 6, 20  
November 3, 17  
December 8, 22
Catholic Charities Expands Immigration Legal Services in Brazos Valley

Families who live in smaller communities throughout the country often do not have the same access to services that are available in larger cities. This is why Catholic Charities opened an office in the Brazos Valley more than eight years ago.

As an active partner in addressing the 27% poverty rate in the Brazos Valley, Catholic Charities recognized a serious lack of access to family-based immigration legal services. As a result, families in need are taken advantage of by unethical immigration consultants, known as “notarios,” who scam clients and can permanently damage their path to citizenship. With the lack of access to services, families had no alternatives to these scammers.

Catholic Charities recognized the need for high-quality, low-cost immigration services, including consultations, case work and legal representation. In partnership with the Brazos Interfaith Immigration Network, Catholic Charities was able to help 140 individuals in the Brazos Valley last year with this approach.

“This expansion will foster growth and allow Catholic Charities to serve 150 more clients annually.”

A full-time ILS presence in this community was a priority and now, with support from the Texas Bar Foundation, Catholic Charities has invested further in the community with our first full-time staff attorney in the Brazos Valley. This expansion will foster growth and allow Catholic Charities to serve an additional 150 clients annually, doubling the number of clients served each year.

“We are grateful to receive support from the Texas Bar Foundation, as it will enable Catholic Charities to extend efforts in fulfilling our mission to help families and welcome the stranger,” said Executive Director Sara Ramirez. “Qualified families who reach out for help will have access to high-quality immigration legal services, allowing them to stay together and safe.”

Since its inception in 1965, the Texas Bar Foundation has awarded more than $16 million in grants to law-related programs. Supported by members of the State Bar of Texas, the Texas Bar Foundation is the nation’s largest charitably-funded bar foundation.

Carlos Lopez is Catholic Charities’ first full-time staff attorney working in the Brazos Valley Office.

welcoming the stranger
Charity and Service at All Ages

Philanthropic is not commonly how you describe an elementary schooler, but Morgan Johnson fit the bill. For her sixth birthday, she asked her friends to give her items to donate to charity instead of gifts for herself.

Now as a high schooler, Morgan is an active donor, advocate and volunteer for Catholic Charities of Central Texas.

Each year, Morgan continues her birthday tradition by asking her friends to give diapers, wipes, baby clothing and toys to the Catholic Charities Gabriel Project Life Center. A program providing pregnancy and parenting resources, the Gabriel Project Life Center relies on these donations to give relief to families facing a crisis pregnancy. Morgan's donations help Catholic Charities to give more than 600 babies a safe and healthy start at life annually.

“You are just one person, but you can make a difference.”

In addition to her philanthropic work, Morgan also helps lead a group of 6th graders in volunteer work at the Gabriel Project Life Center. She sets a beautiful example of how anyone can incorporate service to others into their daily lives.

Morgan says about volunteering at Catholic Charities, “It is a wonderful action you can do to help others. It is an amazing feeling to know that even the little things you do can help many people. You are just one person, but you can make a difference.”

We are so grateful to Morgan and her family for their lifelong commitment to making a difference.

To learn more about the Gabriel Project Life Center or volunteering with Catholic Charities, visit us at www.ccctx.org.

1. Morgan sells flower hair clips at “Morgan’s Garden” during the Children’s Business Fair, with proceeds partially benefitting Catholic Charities Gabriel Project Life Center.

2. In 2013, Morgan personally delivers diapers, baby wipes and stuffed animals that she collected for her birthday.

3. Morgan inspired the next group of girls from St. John Neumann Catholic Parish Challenge group to volunteer with Catholic Charities.
Kenedy Memorial Foundation Gives Hope to Families

A longtime supporter of Catholic Charities, the John G & Marie Stella Kenedy Memorial Foundation has helped to give babies a safe and healthy start through support of our Gabriel Project Life Center. Their gift of $5,000 will help us expand our reach from serving 600 families in this program last year to more than 800 this year.

Texas currently ranks 46th in the nation for the overall wellbeing of children in our state. This shocking statistic is not the legacy of life that Texas is proud to affirm.

Catholic Charities of Central Texas seeks to change that fact by addressing the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of women and families facing crucial decisions surrounding unplanned pregnancy, as well as preventing child abuse and neglect. Providing pregnancy and parenting education is an important component of our service that aims to give parents the tools and resources to give their children a safe and healthy start at life.

We are grateful to the Kenedy Memorial Foundation for their continued support of services that promote respect for human dignity and life.

The Kenedy Memorial Foundation is organized exclusively for charitable purposes. Founded in 1961 by Sarita Kenedy East, granddaughter of Mifflin Kenedy and Petra Vela Kenedy, the Foundation has donated more than 200 million dollars to charitable causes and organizations in Texas. In South Texas, where the majority of its contributions have been made, the Foundation is one of the major charity contributors.

Clients learn about infant CPR during a first-aid class.

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**In Memory**
- Sherry Beyer-Beeson
- Westin E. Beyer
- Pamela Carlson
- Axel Carlson
- Alice Carrillo
- Gus A. Carrillo
- Charles & Hilda Del Dotto
- Frederick J. Magistro
- Charles & Mary Dickerson
- Ronald Belcik

**Bernard & Katherine Lenart**
- Bernard & Alice Lenart
- Clay & Judy Mayo
- Wade Mayo III
- Barbara L Nieves
- Eddie Nieves
- Graciela Soler
- Parents of Dr. Juan Posada
- & Graciela Soler

**In Honor**
- Pamela Carlson
- My Family
- Ruth Casarez
- Pope Francis
- George & Lynette Fanguy
- Dr. & Mrs. Fanguy
- William & Teresita Grace
- Fr. Charles Davis
- Jose & Bertha Guerra
- Our wounded Warriors

- Donald & Mary Beth Kiser
- Ted & Keili Smith
- Patrick & Carol Nex
- The Blake Litton Family
- Joseph & Jennifer Pettibon
- Fr. Edwin Kagoo
- Anna Tangredi
- Sam & Phyllis Chirafis
- Barbara Cameron
- Paul & Shannon Cameron
When a family struggles to provide for their children’s basic needs like food and shelter, the idea of fulfilling a Christmas wish list can seem nearly impossible. Yet, who doesn’t want to bring the joy of presents under the tree to their children on Christmas morning?

During the weeks leading up to Christmas, every family who walked through the doors of Catholic Charities was offered gifts for their children.

Thanks to the generosity of our Christmas program partners, Catholic Charities provided toys and gifts for 266 children across Central Texas, making this Catholic Charities’ largest Christmas Program to date. We are proud to make Christmas a little brighter for all our families.

2015 Christmas Program Partners
Family Giving Tree
Pajama Program & Carters Babies and Kids
Regina Mater
St. John Vianney Catholic Church, Round Rock
St. Mary’s Academy Alumnae Association
St. Michael’s Catholic Academy, Austin
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, College Station
People of faith serving anyone in need by strengthening families and promoting respect for human dignity and life.

Did you know?
Catholic Charities shares inspiring stories, beautiful photos and informational articles on social media. Follow us to stay up to date as we launch into a new realm of service for Central Texas!