The Peace Leaders of Tomorrow

I saiah 43’s Young Peacemakers Leadership Council is inspired by the bible verse, “Let peace begin with me.” This student-run group is dedicated to becoming the peacemakers of our time. Twelfth-grader Brooke reflects, “YPLC is a great opportunity to share my thoughts and opinions with people my age. I believe I made a great choice in joining because I have made life-changing and lifelong friends.”

The teenaged leaders dedicate themselves to being informed about current events and Catholic Social Teaching, as well as remaining faithful to a commitment to being a positive role model. Jade, a senior in high school, shared that YPLC helped her feel engaged with the community by participating in service projects, conversations with local leaders, and field trips. Contact Theresa Nguyen at tnguyen@ccano.org to learn more or apply to participate.

Nothing can be solved alone. YPLC is a group of young peacemakers coming up with ways to change the world around us.

This group meets the second and fourth Wednesday of each month and stays engaged with the community by participating in service projects, conversations with local leaders, and field trips. Contact Theresa Nguyen at tnguyen@ccano.org to learn more or apply to participate.

Read more about Isaiah 43’s programming at http://www.ccano.org/isaiah-43.

Bethlehem Housing on the Northshore

Bethlehem Housing serves families experiencing homelessness not just in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, but in St. Tammany and Washington parishes too. Utilizing our Northshore Pastoral Center’s community connections, Bethlehem Housing plugged in to the needs of Northshore residents like Sharon.

When we first met Ms. Sharon, a 58-year old single mother with a 16-year old son with Down syndrome, she had been homeless for over a year. She and her son, “Robbie,” had moved in with a friend but were soon asked to leave. Due to her health issues, Sharon is unable to have a traditional career. With no job, limited income, and no place to go, Ms. Sharon heard about the Catholic Caring Center in Slidell. Ms. Sharon and Robbie lived at the Caring Center Shelter for a year when she was referred to Bethlehem Housing through the Northshore Community Connections.

After Ms. Sharon started working with a Bethlehem Family Coach, she began to regain her drive, dedication, and patience to keep searching for housing in spite of her declining health. Her Family Coach followed up with landlords for status updates on units, visited her weekly to check on her well-being, and eventually helped secure housing for Robbie and her in their desired neighborhood.

On December 1, 2019, Ms. Sharon received keys to her new home. As housewarming gifts, Bethlehem Housing provided Ms. Sharon with application fees, security deposit, rent assistance, and holiday gifts. Most importantly, though, they helped her find her way to a stable home for the holidays.

Learn more about CCANO’s Housing and Homeless Services at http://www.ccano.org/housing-and-homeless-services.
More than Four Walls at Sacred Heart Apartments

The CCANO team at Sacred Heart Apartments has a special bond. Shayla Kaywood, Ray Davies, Dorothy McKnight, and Achiwat Edwards serve and treat each of their clients with dignity and respect. The coworkers are like a family, supporting each other over the years and facing challenges as a team. Ms. Dorothy and Mr. Ray have been at Sacred Heart since it opened and welcomed Shayla and Achiwat with open arms.

Sacred Heart Apartments provides intensive case management, counseling, client advocacy, life skills, conflict resolution, and move to their clients. The participants face a number of obstacles, including ongoing mental health treatment, adjusting to living independently after being homeless for years, increased relapse occurrences, financial management, personal accountability, etc. A lot of our clients have mental health issues that are underdiagnosed like psychosis with hallucinations and delusions. If they have been diagnosed, it is most likely with depression and anxiety, but we have found that bipolar disorder has been inaccurately overdiagnosed,” shares Shayla Kaywood, Program Director.

The team regularly finds themselves confronting misconceptions about the people they work with. “The homeless population is often misunderstood because we take for granted the simple luxuries we overlook in our day to day lives. After being homeless for so long, a lot of our clients have a hard time adjusting even though they now have an apartment. We try to assure them that they can actually lay in their beds instead of the floor, relax on the couch, or even watch tv. We provide supportive services like budgeting because they have not had enough money in the past to actually have to decide how to spend it or save,” says Shayla.

For instance, one of the ways staff assists clients with transitioning is with food storage. Sacred Heart Apartments clients have not had access to a refrigerator for so long that staff needs to teach them about perishable versus nonperishable food items. “We have found some of our clients set up their refrigerators as if it is a pantry. A lot of our work is reteaching basic skills,” reflects Kaywood.

Recently, six clients completed a ten week program addressing spiritual wellness, physical health, nutrition, exercise, medication management, and meal prep. The clients received certificates of completion at a culminating celebration. “It was so proud of how committed our group was to attending each session and following through on meal prep and nutrition. There were two women in the program who really struck me with how significantly they changed. They became so much healthier; they lost weight, and became so much more confident. One of them really opened up and came out of her shell. I saw her grow more sociable because she was consistently getting to know the other participants in a supportive environment,” says Shayla.

A fellow Sacred Heart staff member was able to coach one of the participants, “Janet,” in regards to her hygiene. Janet had been homeless for over five years and considered a traveler, so she did not have access to running water. Ms. Dorothy talked her through a hygiene routine and even bought her a bath and Body Works kit of shower gel and lotion out of her own pocket.

“Something I want others to understand is that our clients didn’t necessarily choose to live on the street and be homeless. Our staff here goes above and beyond for the clients. We take pride in all of them and always try to help out even if we are not the primary case manager in charge of their case. We love being able to support participants with maintaining housing and self-sufficiency so that they can live their best lives,” concludes Kaywood.

Sacred Heart Apartments play an important role in addressing homelessness in our community, and the CCANO leaders appreciate the dedicated staff members who honor our clients’ strengths, help them grow in areas of need, and celebrate each small victory.

Training for Financial Health

Not unlike building muscle with weights and cardio, our financial health needs to be exercised as well, but through education and training. Catholic Charities’ Money Matters program in St. Charles Parish is a financial gym for participants to work out knowledge and skills regarding budgeting, credit scores, and how to open checking and savings accounts. Funded by the United Way of St. Charles, Money Matters provides individuals with financial assistance for training to advance their workforce skills and develop a fit financial life.

After hearing about Money Matters’, DNA class from a friend at work, René Markey was immediately excited by the prospect of becoming a certified nursing assistant to advance her career. René says, “I could hardly wait to get started! I have always wanted to take a CNA class but never had the money to pay for the training. I figured if I had the money to pay for the training. I figured that having the certification would help me get a more stable job with an agency or facility.”

Sherry Rhodes, Money Matters Case Manager, was incredibly helpful through each step of the process, watching as René flourished. “While I was the oldest student in my CNA class, I enjoyed how to manage her finances, René reflects, “I would like to thank Catholic Charities and Ms. Sherry for giving me the opportunity to get the CNA training and I have always wanted”.

Through partnerships, Money Matters also assists clients with employment, housing, SNAP applications, Medicaid enrollment, budget counseling, and more. All of these services result with CCANO clients graduating from the program in a strong financial future.

Money Matters provides individuals with financial assistance for training to advance their workforce skills and develop a fit financial life.

Hurricane Barry Relief Update

While it has been several months since Hurricane Barry impacted the residents of Lafitte, Barataria, and Crown Points, CCANO has been actively working with Father Luke Nguyen of St. Mary’s Church to establish a case management program to provide 25 families with direct assistance thanks to funding from the Greater New Orleans Foundation and Catholic Charities USA. As of December 1, 2019, we have provided those affected with $11,000 of appliances, replacement clothes, bedding, household goods, tools, cleaning supplies, and food. After the emergency food and cleaning supplies drive coordinated by CCANO, St. Anthony church, Second Harvest, and Jefferson Parish in July, we have been helping people on the ground like “Mary” and “Jake.”

A single mother living in an uninsured single-story home in Barataria, Mary took on 90 inches of water due to Barry. CCANO assessed damage to her home, where she lost two beds, clothing, and multiple appliances. Her family and neighbors mucked and gutted Mary’s house within three days of the water receding. After replacing damaged clothing and household items, CCANO was able to help with finding household goods and appliances once Mary’s insurance company concluded their findings.

Jake, a 53-year-old disabled man, was renting a slip for his houseboat at a local Lafitte marina. He supplements his disability income by charging other marina tenants a small amount to do their laundry in his machines. Unfortunately, his fridges, washer, and dryer all flooded due to Barry storms surge. We assessed the damage to his property and enrolled him in case management. Jake attended the emergency food distribution and later received a gift card to purchase clothing and household goods. CCANO arranged for 2-1 Appliances to deliver a replacement washer, dryer, and fridge to his home.

Barry was not the first storm South Louisiana has seen, and it will not be our last. Thankfully, our community continues to rise to the occasion and takes care of each other, pitching in when we hear of a neighbor in need. Learn more about our Disaster Recovery case management at http://www.ccano.org/disaster-recovery-services.

Transitioning Back into the Workforce

A true strength of CCANO is the depth and breadth of our programs. If a participant connects with us through our homeless and housing program, we can much more easily refer them to education for their children through Head Start, mental health services through Counseling Solutions, and career readiness through Integrated Workforce Services to address any and all needs. When Doug, Parish and Counseling Services staff member, met Regina she demonstrated a strong desire to be a role model for her five children and provide for her family. He was then able to connect her to CCANO’s Integrated Workforce Services.

By enrolling in the CCANO Transition to Success Pilot, Regina was eligible for extra coaching and a pool of developmental funding. This plus her continued relationship with Doug meant that she was on the road to success. He still keeps in touch with Regina and is a source of accountability, encouraging her ambition to re-enter the workforce and keep up with job appointments. Additionally, Regina started working with Andrew Romanes of Integrated Workforce Services at the same time CCANO began collaborating with City Sightseeing of New Orleans, an employer referral initiated by Carol Fascio from New Orleans Catholic Cemeteries who works with many local tour companies.

City Sightseeing was looking for new candidates for front line roles in their operations like tour bus drivers, tour guides, and ticket sales. Andrew helped Regina develop a new resume to submit to the hiring manager at City Sightseeing. Friendly and outgoing, Regina immediately attracted attention as a strong candidate for a sales position. Only two weeks into her job search, she was offered the position, which included base pay and the opportunity to earn commissions. She has been employed at City Sightseeing for almost six months now, drawing consistent praise for her work. Consequently, this steady income has reduced her family’s dependence on public assistance programs. While transitioning back into the workforce can be intimidating, Regina is proud to be earning an income, and we are proud to be a part of her journey.

Learn more about our workforce services at http://www.ccano.org/workforce-development.