



Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, Inc.

# The Sage

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## Disaster Program Helps Survivors Thrive

How do you recover from the worst day of your life? If you live in Ventura County, the answer is with Catholic Charities' Disaster Case Management Program (DCMP) which delivers effective, post-disaster case management and recovery for victims of fires and natural disasters, helping survivors through the difficult process of returning to normal life.

The Bobcat Fire of 2020 destroyed the home (pictured above) of a multi-generational DCMP client family, whose life changed in an instant. Catholic Charities walks with them through dedicated case management, connecting them with resources to help rebuild their life.

"Thank you for the gracious help that you have given my family and our community since the Bobcat Fire. Even though the loss was immense, we have been honored and humbled by the outpouring of love and support we have received. With the additional help, we will be able to resume our ability to help and serve our community and friends." -Catholic Charities' Client ❖



*Pictured, left to right: Kinder/1st grade teacher, Evelyn Orellana; school supervisor, Ina Cowo; and 2nd-5th grade teacher, Mayleen Plazola.*

## Teachers Elevate Traumatized Students

When families first arrive at Good Shepherd Shelter (GSS), it is very common for the children to have difficulty expressing their emotions. The trauma they have endured manifests itself in any number of ways including behavioral issues. Recently, two brothers, "George," age six and "Kyle," age seven, developed serious behavioral issues in our GSS elementary school classroom, causing distress and, at times, serious safety concerns.

GSS is the only transitional domestic violence shelter in Los Angeles that has an elementary school onsite. The teachers are trauma-informed, meaning that they recognize when a child has been triggered. George and Kyle had great difficulty managing their emotions and their bodies as their outbursts often led to throwing

objects or hitting themselves. Their teacher, Miss Evelyn, states, "I have been using positive reinforcement and making sure they are praised for good behavior rather than pointing out what they are doing that is not good." The school supervisor, Miss Ina, also shared, "The major challenge is the transition for the children and making them feel safe and building that trust."

The GSS teachers now report that both boys want to learn, they want to go to school, and they perform well in their classes and do their homework. "That's the beauty of our school," Miss Ina said. The children still struggle with their emotions but now have the tools and the trust with the teachers to manage their emotions, which only adds to their healing, growth and self-esteem. ❖

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# Message from the Executive Director, Rev. Monsignor Gregory A. Cox

April 29, 2022, will mark the 30th anniversary of the Los Angeles Riots. This is an appropriate time to reflect on lessons learned from that experience.

On April 29, 1992, a jury acquitted four White Los Angeles Police officers, who had been charged with using excessive force in the arrest and beating of Rodney King, a Black man, a year earlier.

After the verdict was announced, widespread rioting occurred in the County of Los Angeles. The unrest lasted for six days.

When the dust settled, 64 people had died. Of those killed, two were Asian, 28 were Black, 19 were Latino and 15 were White. Also, 2,383 people were injured and 12,000 were arrested. There was approximately \$1 billion in damage to buildings.

In addition to the acquittal verdict in the excessive force trial, various other factors contributed to the unrest. Some of those causes of social tension were high rates of poverty and unemployment, which had been intensified by the national recession. Most of the disturbances occurred in South Central Los Angeles, where the population was 47% African American and 47% Hispanic and one person in three lived in poverty.

The recent demographics of South Los Angeles show that the area is now 76% Hispanic, 21% Black, 1% White and 1% Asian. Persons living below the poverty line still make up 30% of the population of the area.

After 30 years, South Los Angeles has not changed significantly. Quality education, decent jobs, family support services, and an increase in neighborhood policing and affordable housing are still lacking. In regard to educational attainment, 47% of individuals who are 25 and over do not have a high school diploma.

In order for this situation to improve, families, individuals, community leaders, religious leaders, politicians, educators, law enforcement, social service agencies and businesses need to come together to provide the needed resources to a community that is underserved. ❖

## AYES Assists Probationers with Job Training

Archdiocesan Youth Employment Services (AYES) is contracted by Los Angeles County Probation Department to participate in INVEST INNOVATIVE EMPLOYMENT SOLUTIONS (Sustainable Employment Opportunities for Adults on Probation in Los Angeles County).

In that capacity, the AYES program assists justice-involved individuals on active Los Angeles County probation. INVEST's aim is to alleviate acute barriers to long-term self-sufficiency for probationers by providing access to high growth vocational training, employment and supportive services.

Tanya was referred to AYES's INVEST program where she explored her skills and interests and selected a career path. AYES helped Tanya enroll in short-term training at East Los Angeles College in line with her career goal. During training, AYES paid transportation and school-related expenses to lessen Tanya's financial burden, and staff provided counsel and encouragement when she shared feelings of being overwhelmed by her new endeavor.

Tanya proved to be an excellent student and completed her training program with high marks. Following training, AYES continued to support Tanya with job readiness services and access to appropriate job leads. In due course, Tanya secured employment with Los Angeles County where she works as a Clerk.

Tanya is living proof that success after incarceration is possible with the support of a caring team. To learn more about AYES and its workforce services, visit their website at [ayela.org](http://ayela.org). ❖



*Tanya is an AYES success story.*

## Zumba Classes Improve Clients' Health

Catholic Charities' Brownson House has served the Boyle Heights' neighborhood of Los Angeles for over 50 years, providing food, utility and rent assistance, immigration and other legal services, access to healthcare, and many other programs to address the needs of the community. The center offers opportunities to engage in physical activity that are safe and accessible to the Boyle Heights community, including Zumba classes led by a certified instructor, Oscar, who volunteers his time, three evenings a week, to enable clients to participate in professionally-led classes at no cost.

Oscar has taught Zumba in person at Brownson House for the past several years, except during the height of the pandemic when all of the center's in-person classes were canceled. After vaccinations against COVID-19 helped the situation to improve and Brownson House was able to re-open at a limited capacity, Oscar was ready and eager to, again, teach clients there.

A woman who lives down the street from Brownson House, and loyally attends Zumba, said she loves dancing for exercise and appreciates that the classes are free of charge and near her home. Another loyal participant said that, by exercising several days a week in the sessions at Brownson House, she has been able to control her blood sugar and improve her health. ❖



*Oscar poses with his smiling Brownson House Zumba class participants.*

## Esperanza Hosts Sixth Annual "Fiesta De Los Reyes"

Since 2016, Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project has organized a "La Fiesta De Los Reyes Magos" ("Three Kings Day") event for Unaccompanied Minors and their families during the holiday season. This has become a well-loved, annual event that Esperanza clients and staff look forward to each year.

Due to a rise in COVID-19 cases at the end of 2021, in January, Esperanza hosted a virtual event that was packed with fun and educational activities including a Zumba class, COVID-19 information, healthy cooking classes, interactive math strategy activities, self-esteem building activities and more.

Esperanza collaborated with community volunteers and the following organizations to provide another wonderful event to Esperanza clients: Clinica Romero; UCLA's Global Health Program; and Julia Robinson's Math on the Border program. With the generous support of donors, Esperanza was able to raffle off gift cards to families and distribute backpacks filled with presents to the children who attended.

For more information on the work of Esperanza, or to learn how you can help in next year's Fiesta de Los Reyes Magos event, please contact Kimberley Plotnik at [kplotnik@ccharities.org](mailto:kplotnik@ccharities.org) or visit the Esperanza website at [www.esperanza-la.org](http://www.esperanza-la.org). ❖



*A brother and sister enjoy Esperanza's "Three Kings Day" event.*

## St. Robert's Center Boasts Volunteer Barber

By Tom Hoffarth, Food Program Manager, St. Robert's Center

Bill Megalos is known in the film industry as a prolific documentarian and cinematographer, working in more than 50 countries and teaching at USC. But on a typical Saturday morning at St. Robert's Center in Venice, he is known as Bill the Barber, plugging in his electric shears and giving free haircuts to our unhoused neighbors from the streets.

"The fact people let me touch them is a real gift," said the Brooklyn native. "Sometimes the only time they're being touched is when they get hurt, get robbed, get hassled by the police. To be able to give a positive touch interaction is very appealing."

Megalos has done this for 20 years, starting with an outreach project in Santa Monica with his then-fifth-grade daughter. Another local program, with which he had been working, cancelled volunteers during the pandemic. A regular homeless guest from there directed Bill to St. Robert's Center last summer.

"I really love this open space here, it isn't threatening and makes people more comfortable," said Megalos. ❖



*"Bill the Barber" is a blessing to St. Robert's Center clients.*



# Jobe Resident Makes the Grade

Kamau is a 22-year-old resident at Jobe Transitional Living Program. He was referred to Jobe by a representative of the Educational Opportunity Program at California State University Northridge. During Kamau's freshman year, he lost his housing and was at risk for homelessness. In addition to providing stable housing and support services to former foster youth, Jobe also serves college students who lack stable housing.



*Kamau will graduate from college in May.*

He is an excellent student who has also made the Dean's list for the last four semesters at Cal State Northridge and is on track to graduate in May 2022 with a degree in Africana Studies. He will be the first person in his family to graduate from college. Kamau aspires to obtain a Master's degree in Diverse Community Development Leadership and give back to his community.

Kamau entered the Jobe program in April 2018. During his tenure at Jobe, he reached numerous benchmarks including obtaining his driver's license, purchasing his first car, securing employment, building his credit and savings, and mastering time management. These criteria are critical for preparing Kamau to transition out of Jobe and into independence as a self-sufficient young adult.

Kamau has never let his situation define him. He defines himself as an articulate, overachieving young man. Kamau is very grateful for all the assistance and support he has received from Jobe and wants to uplift his community and advocate for others in lower socioeconomic society.

Jobe is very proud of Kamau's achievements and success. ❁



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*Address Service Requested*



*Every Saturday, St. Robert's Center in Venice provides a food program for people experiencing homelessness in the community.*



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