



Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, Inc.

# The Sage

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## St. Margaret's Center Hosts Drive-through Christmas Party

Christmas joy came to 501 disadvantaged families in the Lennox area, thanks to the generous supporters of Catholic Charities' St. Margaret's Center. The center's annual Christmas party for local families in need has taken place for 30 years.

A drive-through Christmas program was created by staff and volunteers at Lennox Middle School, with Santa present for the 1,317 children to view.

There was also entertainment along with elves who distributed goody bags containing Christmas cookies, grocery and Target gift cards to each family, along with stuffed animals for the children.

Mary Agnes Erlandson, Program Director, expressed gratitude to the donors who continue to support St. Margaret Center's work during these challenging times. "We witness suffering and great need every day and it is wonderful to bring joy to so many at Christmas time," she stated. ❖

## Upholding Dignity one Bag at a Time

The new and updated Glendale Food Pantry program is an attempt to revamp and upgrade the way food is distributed. This new pantry is open an extra 23 hours a week to allow working individuals and families extra time to access nutritional food and services. Additionally, clients are able to receive food on a bi-monthly basis, as opposed to the traditional one time per month, providing them with the opportunity to receive twice as much food.

The focus is on upholding the dignity of clients affected by COVID-19 by allowing them the autonomy to select what they want instead of receiving a prepacked or standard bag of groceries. After clients have received their food items, they are being asked if they are in need of any additional services such as rental, utility or employment assistance.

One client, Monica, stated, "Because of



Monica signs in as a client at the Glendale Food Pantry.

COVID I lost my job and so I've had to go to multiple food banks in order to have enough food for me and my kids. The volunteers and workers at the Glendale center show me that they care; I'm not just another person in line. They gave me food, clothing, and Christmas toys for my daughter and son. They are helping me to apply for money for utilities. I don't know where I would be without the help they have given me. I am so thankful." ❖

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

Socrates was the first Greek moral philosopher of the ethical tradition of thought. He once said, “The shortest and surest way to live with honor in the world is to be in reality what we would appear to be; all human virtues increase and strengthen themselves by practice and experience of them.” He reminds us of the importance of us being what we perceive ourselves to be, virtuous.

The pandemic continues to be a condition of the world around us. Catholic Charities of Los Angeles has accepted this challenge from the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. We have encouraged staff to be vaccinated. Approximately 90% of staff are vaccinated and we require weekly testing for the remaining 10% who are not vaccinated.

Catholic Charities of Los Angeles served approximately 176,000 pandemic clients last year. We have shared with our clients the importance of being vaccinated and of following the health guidelines from Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties’ Departments of Public Health. We have implemented policies concerning cleaning and disinfecting our homeless shelters and community facilities.

Before and since the pandemic outbreak, Catholic Charities has been committed to serving the most vulnerable in our society. As a testimony of our commitment, staff have made many sacrifices to achieve our mission. Sixteen percent of staff have tested positive for the virus and have returned to serving our clients once they recovered.

How we provide our services is just as important as what services we provide. The practice and the experience of virtue is part of the healing relationship we have with those we serve. The tools of our trade are the virtues of compassion, generosity, integrity, honesty and courage. These virtuous tools need to be implemented during the most trying times. The more we practice and experience virtues in our service to those in need, the more we bring honor to our clients and ourselves. ❀

## Good Shepherd Shelter Partners with DHS to Resist COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging within a transitional domestic violence shelter. Working remotely has never been an option for the shelter program staff, as the families need support and resources daily. In October 2020, Good Shepherd Shelter coordinated with Los Angeles County’s Department of Health Services’ program, Housing for Health, to come to the shelter once a month to administer COVID-19 tests to both staff and residents. The shelter has reported only three positive cases since the start of the pandemic, all of which were among staff, and the last case was over one year ago.

In the early months of 2021, the shelter program staff gained access to the COVID-19 vaccines, due to their designation as essential workers. Over the course of the



*A GSS staff member and a resident wait after receiving the vaccine.*

following months, only ten percent of the moms eligible for the vaccine got the shots and, at that time, none of the children got vaccinated as all were under the age of twelve.

In November 2021, DHS offered a COVID-19 vaccine information session in conjunction with the monthly testing visit. In December, they conducted a vaccine clinic at the shelter and over 50% of staff members received a booster shot and 90% of the families were given first, second or booster doses, including a number of the children over five years of age.

GSS is grateful for the resources DHS provides to keep the COVID-19 virus out of the shelter so that the focus can remain on offering support and healing to the mothers and children. ❀

# CCLA Provides Immigration Support For Afghan Nationals

**M**ohammad and Hawa Azizi emigrated to the U.S. from Afghanistan in 1989, leaving behind a large extended family. Due to the recent humanitarian crisis, their extended family is now desperate to leave Afghanistan since some family members worked for the U.S. military and are therefore targeted for arrest and further harm from the Taliban.

Earlier in 2021, the U.S. opened its doors to Afghani Nationals, allowing entry through the Humanitarian Parolee (HP) process. HP allows eligible individuals temporary admission for urgent humanitarian reasons and the opportunity to apply for asylum. There is a great need for legal services' organizations to assist with HP applications.

Catholic Charities' Immigration Services is responding to this need by processing HP and asylum applications for Afghani Nationals at no charge through 2022. Catholic Charities has successfully filed seven applications for the Azizi family, with 25 applications for remaining family members still in process.

How to help: Become a sponsor to help bring families like Mr. Azizis' safely to the U.S. and/or provide financial support for USCIS application fees. To contribute, or for more information on becoming a sponsor, please contact Steve Lee, Immigration Director, at [slee@ccharities.org](mailto:slee@ccharities.org) and/or visit the Immigration Services' webpage at [CatholicCharitiesLA.org/IRR-immigration-and-refugee-services](https://CatholicCharitiesLA.org/IRR-immigration-and-refugee-services). ❖



*Mr. Azizi appreciates his Catholic Charities' Immigration Counselor, Edith M.*

## Jobe Resident Thrives

**M**aya is an eighteen-year-old former foster youth who was referred to the Jobe Transitional Residence program by her older brother, Aaron, who is also a resident of Jobe. The program is designed to support Transitional Aged Youth, ages 18-25, who have aged out of the foster care system. Since entering the program in June 2021, Maya has met many benchmarks with lightning speed. Maya attends California State University Northridge, where she is an excellent student, majoring in psychology and aspiring to become a social worker.

Maya obtained her driver's license in July 2021 and purchased a used car in August 2021. She also secured part-time employment at a local restaurant, within weeks of entering Jobe. Maya has been dedicated to building her savings, laying the foundation for a successful future.

Maya gets along very well with all her peers and Jobe staff. She is always willing to give another resident a ride or offer to tutor him or her, if needed. Keith Wieser, Program Director of Jobe, stated, "Maya is an example that foster youth have a better chance of being successful when they are provided with stable housing, support, and guidance. We are all very proud of Maya." ❖



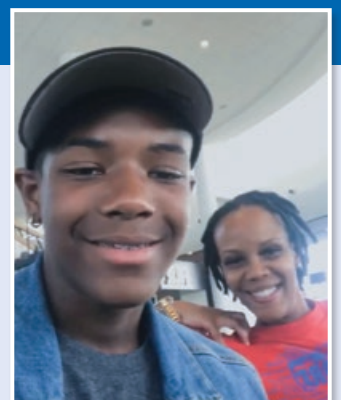
## San Pedro Region Assists Mother and Son from New Orleans

**I**n September 2021, Arkasha Sturdivant and her 16-year-old son, Kejuna, left New Orleans for Long Beach, where the 37-year-old mother has family, to escape an unsafe environment. Unfortunately, the relatives did not have room for them. Arkasha used what money she had so she and Kejuna could stay in a motel. When those funds ran out, the mother and son lived in her car.

Finally, Arkasha was connected to Catholic Charities' Long Beach Community Center, where Case Manager, Jasmine Booker, arranged for them to stay at Catholic Charities' Elizabeth Ann Seton Residence and provided them with food and clothing. Jasmine also referred the mother and son to Long Beach Mental Health where they received counseling to help them cope with the trauma they had faced in New Orleans.

Jasmine told Arkasha about Goodwill SOLAC in Long Beach and their Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) program. Arkasha joined that program, obtained a CNA license and is now working for a medical clinic.

Kejuna is a student at Cabrillo High School and will be trying out for the volleyball team. They received Section 8 housing and now happily live in a one-bedroom apartment in Long Beach. ❖



*Kejuna took this selfie of his mother and himself in the food court in the Carson mall.*



# Community Rallies to Purchase New Truck for Catholic Charities Lompoc

In June of 2021, Catholic Charities Lompoc received unsettling news. Their 15-year-old delivery truck, which provided the food pantry with a steady supply of fresh local produce and grocery items, was deemed ineligible to operate by the California Air Resources Board. The pantry serves 2,800 families and individuals per month, and the loss of the truck would cripple the capacity to feed the needy of Lompoc. The pantry picks up food from local grocery stores six times per week.

Catholic Charities' Lompoc staff and advisory board members put their heads together to find a solution. The result was incredible.

In July, Grocery Outlet Lompoc held its Independence from Hunger campaign which donated \$12,766 for the Pantry and kick-started the campaign, and a longtime pantry volunteer donated \$20,000. Local media Channel 12 picked up on the efforts and ran stories on the need for a truck.

Local businesses stepped up including: Alfie's Fish & Chips, Augusto Caudillo, Bumatay Jewelers, Chef Vilay, Dare 2 Dream, Dreamers' Vegan, Good Morning Lompoc,

Letter Carriers, Nākid, Southside Coffee, Sparks Music, Sunset Auto Center, Surf Connection, TaylerMade Training, Toyota of Lompoc, Valley Auto Glass and Wild West Pizza, as well as St. Mary's Church, the Vandenberg Village Rotary Club and countless individuals.

In just six weeks, the Lompoc Community raised more than \$50,000 to fully fund the purchase of a new, 2022 Ford E-350 Delivery Truck from Jim Vreeland Ford in

Buellton. Michael Lockard, Regional Director for Catholic Charities in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, said "We are truly grateful for this generosity, which will allow Catholic Charities to continue serving those in need at the highest level of respect and dignity." ❀



*Advisory Board Member, Rebecca Abille, who provided the graphic design services at no cost, poses alongside the new truck.*



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*Address Service Requested*



*Glendale Community Center's Loaves & Fishes food pantry provides needed food, four days per week, to low-income families, disabled veterans, seniors, and immigrants in the surrounding area.*



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