



Ventura Community Center Assists Single Father



“I’m just trying to find ways to provide for my kids,” says Catholic Charities’ client Anthony Figueroa. The single father, who has seven children and sole custody of two, has utilized the Ventura Community Center Food Pantry for five years. Clinically disabled and having been ordered by a physician to retire from construction due to a Fibromyalgia diagnosis, Anthony experiences uncontrollable shakes, severe pain, and is unable to work. He lives on a fixed welfare income and struggles to pay the rent, utility bills, and put food on the table.

“I thank God for Catholic Charities and for the fact that the food pantry is right down the street.” The supplemental food he gets weekly assists in providing nutritious meals for his children and they are eager to sign-up for this year’s Christmas gift program offered by the Ventura Community Center with St. Jude’s Parish in Westlake Village. ❀

Employment Support Partnership Program Assists Ukrainian Refugee

Catholic Charities’ Employment Support Partnership (ESP) program assists newly arrived refugees and immigrants during their first few critical years in the U.S., with the goal to provide them with economic stability and social integration in the community.

When Ashkhen and her family fled Ukraine and arrived in the U.S. in April 2023, they faced many challenges with no job prospects. They knew little English and had unstable housing. After they came to Catholic Charities for help, their journey began to change.

With the guidance of her ESP case manager, Nancy Ponamarenko, Ashkhen explored her marketable skills and past work experience. Her past experience and interest in baking opened the door for an internship at a local bakery. She also started classes to improve her English language skills and enrolled in Housing Assistance for Ukrainians (HAU), a program Catholic Charities provides in partnership with Los



Ashkhen and her ESP Case Manager, Nancy, opened doors to employment opportunities in the pastry/baking industry.

Angeles County to assist Ukrainian refugees with housing costs. With the ongoing support of ESP staff, and with a very positive attitude, Ashkhen and her family are on well on their way to building a stable live in the U.S.

To learn more about ESP services or to donate, visit the ESP website at www.catholiccharitiesla.org/esp/. ❀

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

What is it like to be hungry all the time? To find out, Senator John Tunney of California, the son of heavyweight boxing champion Gene Tunney and Polly Lauder Tunney, spent two weeks trying to eat on \$1.25 per day. He did this experiment in the late 1960s. He had learned that many retired Americans had only \$1.25 a day to spend on food. In those two weeks, he lost six pounds and learned: "I don't like it. You spend almost all your time thinking about food."

The older American people, 65 and older, numbered 57.9 million in 2022. They represent 17.3% of the population, more than one in every six Americans. The number of older Americans has increased by 34% since 2012, compared to an increase of 2% in the population under 65.

The median income of older people in 2022 was \$29,740. For all older people reporting income in 2022 (65.7 million), 10% reported less \$10,000, and 58% reported \$25,000 or more. These numbers mean that 10% of individuals 65 and older lived below the poverty level.

Older adults want to remain living in their homes and communities. Approximately 88% of seniors said it was important for them to continue living safely in their homes for as long as possible.

Catholic Charities of Los Angeles provides quality services for our elderly population. Our shelters and community centers provide shelter and food to the 5,400 who are homeless in the counties of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and Ventura.

Our program called Older Adult Services and Intervention System (OASIS) provides case management services to older adults, 60 years and older, with volunteer support services which enable older adults to remain independent and avoid premature or unnecessary institutionalization that also affirms their value and dignity.

Senator Tunney had a better appreciation of the plight of the elderly living below the poverty level when he put himself in their shoes. May we learn from his experience that many of our elderly go hungry every day. As we reach out to all the poor and vulnerable, let us not forget the elderly. ❖

Jobe is Very Proud of Champion

Champion joined the Jobe program in May 2024 and quickly began building his savings to buy his first new car. Champion took his driver's permit test and passed on the first attempt. He then began his driver training class to assist him in preparing for his behind-the-wheel exam with the DMV. Jobe assists all residents with drivers training so they learn how to drive safely and are prepared for their behind-the-wheel exam.



Congratulations to Champion for purchasing his first new car shortly after obtaining his driver's license.

Champion has always been dedicated to his education and has constantly strived for success. He started at Pierce

Community College when he was 13 years old in the ninth grade and earned his associate degree when he was 17 years old. Champion also received the DRES (Disability Resources and Educational Services) Recognition Award and the Black Scholars Matter (BSM) Scholarship. He will be graduating with honors from CSUN in December 2024 with a bachelor's degree in psychology. Champion will only be twenty years old in December! Champion has applied

for graduate school and aspires to earn his master's in social work and become a licensed clinical social worker. ❖

The Landing Assists Pregnant and Parenting Youth

Tahliya was a pregnant Transitional-Aged Youth (TAY) in 2022 when the Safe Place for Youth (SPY) Access Center in Venice, which assists young people experiencing homelessness, referred her to Catholic Charities' program, The Landing, at St. Robert's Center in Venice. Both The Landing and SPY assisted Tahliya until she turned 25, the cut off age for the SPY TAY program.

Shortly after that time, Tahliya gave birth to a son. She had a Section 8 housing voucher but needed help to navigate the process to get housing. Ricarda Santos, a case manager at The Landing, a daytime wellness and respite center for pregnant and parenting youth and their children, came to Tahliya's rescue.

Ricarda researched homes that would accept the housing voucher, helped with completing and sending documents and advocated to get Tahliya and her baby housed before the voucher expired. After a few months, Ricarda was able to get her client housed in a safe place and Tahliya remains very thankful for the help. ❖



Tahliya is thankful to Ricarda and The Landing.

San Pedro Region Provides Permanent Supportive Housing Program

Gilbert Pike, a former client of Project Achieve, has overcome a lifetime of pain and hardship to find permanent housing, thanks to Catholic Charities of Los Angeles (CCLA). His story began with a traumatic childhood that led to substance abuse and, eventually, homelessness.

In 2020, Gilbert entered the Project Achieve Year-Round Shelter Program in Long Beach, operated by CCLA's San Pedro Region for homeless singles, and he returned there in 2022. After the program closed on June 30, 2023, Catholic Charities stepped in with a new Permanent Supportive Housing program, providing housing for 18 chronically homeless individuals in scattered sites across Long Beach. The program covers 70% of rent and offers intensive case management services.

Today, we are proud to announce that Gilbert Pike is no longer sleeping on the streets and that he has permanent housing. His success brings joy not only to him but also to the San Pedro Region staff who supported him throughout his journey. ❖



Gilbert's story is a testament to resilience and the impact of supportive services for the homeless.

St. Barnabas Parishioners Organize Food Drive for Long Beach Pantry

The parishioners of St. Barnabas' Social Justice Committee show their commitment to helping those in need. A group of 15 dedicated parishioners organized a successful food drive benefiting the Catholic Charities of Los Angeles' (CCLA) Long Beach Community Center and Food Pantry. Their efforts resulted in the donation of 260 bags filled with canned goods, dry food items, and snacks, including breakfast bars and mixed nuts, which are perfect for the homeless community's on-the-go needs.

These generous contributions will directly support the center's weekly food distribution on Tuesdays and Thursdays, providing vital resources to individuals and families struggling with food insecurity in the Long Beach area. The donation of snacks for our homeless neighbors, in particular, is a thoughtful touch that will help meet immediate hunger needs.

The CCLA San Pedro Region team was overjoyed to receive this incredible show of support and were on hand to assist with picking up the donations. This collaboration highlights the power of community action and how much can be achieved when people come together for a common cause. ❖



San Pedro Region Case Manager, Christian Lauria; San Pedro Regional Director, Bruce Hackman; and San Pedro Region Release Services Case Manager, Dameon Gordon, are grateful for the successful food drive.

Good Shepherd Shelter Mom Soars

Former Good Shepherd Shelter (GSS) resident, Mimie, transitioned into her own home with her three children in October 2023. It was a great achievement as Mimie and her boys overcame significant trauma stemming from the domestic violence environment they escaped in the Congo. While in the GSS program, one of Mimie's most important goals was to become a United States citizen. GSS connected her with tutors and other resources to work toward this goal. Over this past year, she worked the third shift and studied while her children were in school. Mimie's dream was realized in August 2024 when she passed her exam and officially became a naturalized citizen. She could not contain her excitement, her smile beaming from ear to ear. She said, "My world has just opened up. I cannot even begin to think about how this will change my life and my boys' lives. I will always be so grateful to the shelter for putting me on a safe path of strength." Since becoming a citizen, Mimie changed jobs earning a higher wage and is preparing to move her family from the one-bedroom apartment they have shared this past year to a much more spacious two-bedroom apartment. GSS is so happy for the family and so proud of Mimie for never giving up. ❖



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Address Service Requested



Catholic Charities distributes bags of nutritious food and serves hot Thanksgiving meals to the poor and homeless at its centers and shelters.



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