

# HOPEFUL HAPPENINGS

Winter Edition 2024

A Newsletter of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County



## A Message from Mike Donoghue, our Executive Director



Happy New Year!

Reflecting on the past year, I am so very thankful for the generosity and compassion of our volunteers, donors, and prayer warriors who have assisted us in serving our most vulnerable neighbors. YOUR support for our neighbors in need made such a difference for so many! YOUR commitment to our mission enabled us to achieve numerous milestones in 2023.

Throughout the year, your help and empathy made it possible for us to open our doors at the new Thomas Merton Family Center, where our neighbors in Bridgeport are now receiving multiple services to improve their lives under one roof. Your support for our mental health services allowed New Outlook Counseling to expand, reaching even more families and individuals struggling with depression, anxiety, and other debilitating conditions. The support YOU provide encourages families and individuals to strive for a healthier and more secure future.

As we enter 2024, your partnership and benevolence are needed more than ever as demand for our services is growing exponentially! Please take a few minutes to read about the services YOU make possible. I am so very grateful for your help and support and I wish you and your families a happy and healthy 2024!

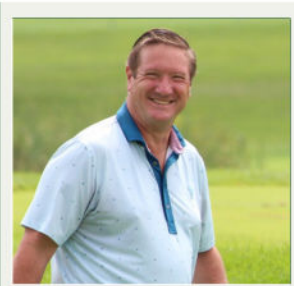
God Bless You and THANK YOU for all you do,



### Community Moments of 2023

Throughout the past year, your support and dedication made many incredible moments possible. As we embark on 2024, we eagerly anticipate the new moments we will share together as a community.

Here are a few moments to reflect on:



Catholic Charities Golf Classic



New Covenant Center Summer Soirée



Danbury Celebrity Breakfast



Morning Glory's Rib Rally



Norwalk Celebrity Breakfast

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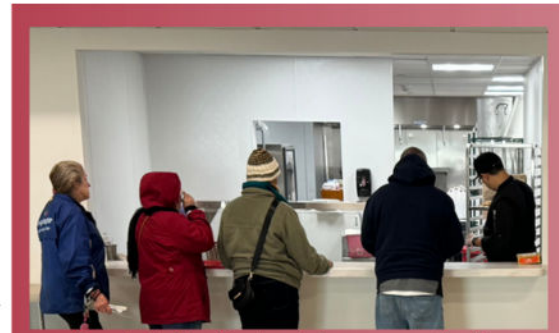


## Welcoming a New Era at Thomas Merton Family Center

The doors to our new Thomas Merton Family Center officially opened to guests for daily meals, food pantry shopping, and case management services in December. Founded in 1974, this move represents a historic moment for the Thomas Merton Center, which has been serving the homeless and working poor in the former St Joseph's Church at 43 Madison Avenue in Bridgeport. As the new year begins, full operation of our expanded services will start, including primary medical care, mental health counseling, job training, housing assistance and immigration legal services.

Our mission to treat all of our guests with dignity and respect focuses on offering a "hand up" to our guests in one convenient location. We are excited to partner with Southwest Community Health Center who will provide a comprehensive suite of medical, dental, and behavioral health services. This partnership represents a significant step toward offering our guests easily accessible holistic care.

As this new era unfolds, we invite you to join us and see all that you have made possible. Whether you need assistance, are interested in volunteering, or are curious about our initiatives, your involvement is vital to our mission.



Guests in line for lunch in our new facility



One of Southwest Community Health Center's examination rooms in our new facility

## Family Loan Program: Devon's New Beginning

Devon, a single mom, faced the daily challenge of an old, unreliable car — not merely an inconvenience but a financial burden, especially with the safety of her young son suffering from autism in mind. A dependable car wasn't just transportation; it was essential for Alton's school, work, doctor visits, and the rhythm of family life.

The Family Loan Program entered her life, providing financial education and assistance, equipping her with financial skills for the future. After an extensive process, the delightful news arrived: a \$10,000 loan approval! The outcome? A sturdy Nissan Rogue that she proudly owns.

With the Family Loan Program's support and unwavering spirit, Devon isn't stranded but journeying with her son toward a hopeful future.



Devon and Alton with their car

## Navigating Immigration with Empathy

Throughout Fairfield County, many individuals are embarking on a profoundly human journey to navigate the intricacies of immigration—a daunting process that can be overwhelmingly complex. Our Immigration Services teams in Bridgeport and Norwalk approach each situation with empathy, care, and persistence. Our staff members, drawing from their own immigration journeys, strive to be a comforting presence, helping others realize their dreams of citizenship.

Clients who have successfully attained citizenship with the assistance of Catholic Charities Immigration Services continue to give back to our programs, alleviating the burdens that other clients may face. One former immigration client, Jorge Garcia, generously donated the services of his business, Cultivate, to Room to Grow Preschool. This thoughtful contribution created a greener, happier space for our young learners.

By fostering a community where empathy intertwines with immigration services, we aspire not only to assist individuals on their citizenship journeys but also to create a compassionate environment that echoes the shared humanity in each person's story.



Immigration client celebrating new citizenship



Cultivate Property Enhancement, the business of former immigration client, Jose



## Nurturing Young Explorers

Nestled in the heart of Norwalk, Room to Grow Preschool stands as a distinguished center for early childhood education. As the new year begins, we're excited to open our doors to new young learners in Norwalk and provide an affordable, quality educational program to those in need.

Our educational approach emphasizes holistic child development. While we cherish academic milestones, we equally value each child's social, emotional, and physical development. Through hands-on activities and explorative play sessions, we aim to ignite natural curiosity within a safe and loving setting. Spaces are thoughtfully designed, from our cozy reading nooks to the lively outdoor play areas, all aimed at sparking imagination and promoting learning.

The teachers, volunteers, supportive family members, and community members are the cornerstone of our success. The initial years of a child's life play a pivotal role in shaping their worldview, and at Room to Grow, we are committed to making these years filled with discovery, joy, and genuine care.



Room to Grow Preschool Graduation



Room to Grow Preschool

## Addressing Homelessness

Across Fairfield County, we are witnessing a heartbreaking increase in homelessness. At Catholic Charities, we are facing this challenge head on and are more committed than ever to stand beside our community members during these times.

Seeing our neighbors, friends, and families grappling with challenges that life unexpectedly throws isn't easy. Economic strains, health setbacks, and ever-climbing housing costs have pushed many into unexpected circumstances. Witnessing the difficulties faced by families and individuals reminds us of the very real human stories and aspirations behind each statistic.

One poignant example is Maria's story from Danbury. Maria, along with her three young children, one of whom has autism, arrived in Danbury after escaping an unsafe housing situation in New York. Initially, she stayed with a friend, but due to challenges posed by Maria's son's behavior, the friend became overwhelmed and eventually asked them to leave. Subsequently, Maria and her children found themselves sleeping in their vehicle, prompting her to call 2-1-1 for assistance. She was then scheduled for an appointment with Catholic Charities' Danbury Homeless Services team, who assessed her situation and successfully secured a placement for her family in a local transitional housing program that happened to have a rare vacancy. Since then, Maria has been collaborating with Catholic Charities' Homeless Outreach Case Manager to enroll her children in school and replace lost essential documents, making her eligible for permanent housing opportunities. Additionally, she was referred to Catholic Charities' New Outlook Counseling for mental health services and to our Morning Glory Breakfast Program, ensuring her family receives essential and nutritious meals.



Morning Glory Breakfast Program team in Danbury during a coat drive

## Compassion and Connection at New Outlook Counseling

In 2023, we proudly announced the rebranding and expansion of our mental health therapy services into 'New Outlook Counseling.' Every day, we are privileged to witness remarkable transformations, where couples rediscover lost sparks and families torn apart by misunderstanding learn to rebuild bridges of communication. The joy in these successes belongs to the community, reflecting our collective spirit of resilience and togetherness.

Serving everybody in need is at the heart of our mission. We strive to make our services accessible, affordable, and culturally competent at New Outlook Counseling. Financial constraints should never hinder finding peace and harmony in your family life. Our commitment to fostering a community of support remains unwavering, ensuring that everyone feels empowered on their path to well-being.



New Outlook Counseling



In Loving Memory  
*Michael A. Hack*

March 4, 1956 - November 20, 2023



Catholic Charities of Fairfield County would like to remember and honor our colleague and friend, Michael Hack.

Mike served as a dedicated member and staff person at New Heights for many years, contributing his time, compassion, and unique knowledge of historical trivia to our community. In addition to his role at New Heights, he served as a caseworker in our Community Support Program (CSP), working closely with his team members, including Allison, as pictured in the photo.

A true embodiment of selflessness, Mike always gave of himself to others. His commitment to ensuring the well-being of those he served was exemplified by actions such as personally delivering time-sensitive paperwork for clients who weren't physically able to do it themselves. This not only showcased his dedication to his responsibilities but also provided reassurance to individuals that their important documents were in the right hands and would be handled with care and urgency.

As we mourn the loss of Mike, let us remember and celebrate the profound positive impact he had on our community and the countless lives he touched. Our thoughts and prayers are with Mike's family, friends, and colleagues.

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