

For more than 280 years, local Catholic Charities have been providing help and creating hope in communities across the nation. Today, through comprehensive programs ranging from food and housing assistance to health care and education, more than 1,700 Catholic Charities agencies and institutions annually work with nearly 8 million people, half of whom live below the poverty line. “With compassion and conviction, our member agencies continue a long tradition of serving some of the nation’s most vulnerable families, supporting and empowering them to build successful futures,” says Rev. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA. “We link families to community resources and address the needs of both children and parents to help them move forward in achieving self-sufficiency.”



CATHOLIC CHARITIES SPOKANE

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Award-Winning Program: St. Margaret’s Shelter

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CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

When families band together to better their lives, the support they share can be a powerful boost toward a more positive future. At St. Margaret's Shelter, run by Catholic Charities in Spokane, Wash., families are doing just that – building community, learning new skills, developing their talents and achieving success. Since 2000, the shelter has housed more than 1,200 homeless mothers and children. Nearly all 18 of St. Margaret's current families live on less than 30 percent of the area's median family income and about two-thirds of the families have children in the child welfare system. More than housing, the shelter offers these mothers support to strengthen their families and keep their children out of foster care through parenting education, financial literacy classes, a wellness program and connections to GED and college classes. St. Margaret's also teaches residents about renting and helps families find and keep long-term housing.

"We recognize that our families have multifaceted needs," says Nadine Van Stone, director of St. Margaret's Shelter. "Our comprehensive approach is driven by our families."



OUR SHELTER IS NOT JUST A GROUP OF FAMILIES IN CRISIS LIVING TOGETHER. OUR FAMILIES SHARE A REAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN WHICH MOTHERS ARE ACTIVE LEADERS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SUCCESS OF EVERYONE INVOLVED.

—Nadine Van Stone, director, St. Margaret's Shelter, Catholic Charities Spokane

BUDGETS, PARENTING CLASSES AND YOGA

To help families develop stable economic footing, St. Margaret's Shelter offers weekly economic literacy and job readiness classes for mothers to learn about money management, budgeting, saving, resume writing and interviewing. Catholic Charities also partners with the Responsible Renters program to educate families about the rights and responsibilities of renting and also to connect them with housing subsidies and partnering landlords. Once a family obtains long-term housing, an aftercare manager visits regularly to help ease the transition and support the family in its needs, whether it's finding a food bank or working with Child Protective Services. To further help parents develop strong parenting skills and keep their children, St. Margaret's holds weekly parenting classes.

These efforts have had a noticeable impact: In 2007, 75 percent of families who moved out of the shelter remained in stable housing six months later, and 26 children returned to their birth mother's care.

"Many mothers have a history of challenges from health and addiction issues to domestic violence and incarceration, but they are moving forward and achieving greater stability and success for their families," Van Stone says.

Through a Leadership Council, families also guide many of the shelter's programs. Spurred by families' interest and talents, the shelter started a wellness program including yoga, walking and nutrition education to help families improve their health. Families also supported the idea of a community garden to provide fresh produce and teach mothers entrepreneurial skills.

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Catholic Charities USA, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Catholic Charities with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.