

Matthew 25



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A journal on ministry and service to the margins in western Oregon

Catholic Charities

Help needed to fund medical exams

When you support Catholic Charities of Oregon, you may be surprised at everything that gets covered.

For example, now that public funding has ended for a pilot program that paid for mandatory refugee medical exams, Catholic Charities is hoping to revive the flow of aid with donor assistance.

For a refugee newly arrived in the United States, the initial months can be surprisingly stressful and demanding, even for people who have fled peril in their homelands. Refugees have moved thousands of miles from the only home they have ever known, must adapt to a new language and must assimilate into an unfamiliar culture. Added to these challenges is the federal I-693 medical exam.

The exam is a detailed physical required before refugees can become lawful permanent residents. It covers medical history, vaccines, physical and mental health as well as drug and alcohol screening. There are tests for various communicable diseases. If refugees decline or are unable to undergo the exam, the path to a green card is blocked.

Though the medical exam is vital for refugees, they face many hurdles in taking it, not the least of which is cost. The exams can run \$300 to \$600 per person.

To keep costs lower, Catholic Charities has established a productive collaboration with a physician who once was a refugee. Dr. Edward Lin provides the medical exam at a significantly reduced rate, about a quarter of what others charge.

Dr. Lin, a primary care physician for Providence Health & Services, has a private office where he specializes in low-cost exams for newly arrived immigrants and refugees, especially those without health coverage. There is no way around the I-693 exam, Dr. Lin said.

"It's a scary process for them," he explained. "The process can be very complicated, and they want to feel confident they can trust me to walk them through it. That takes a lot of good support and communication."

Dr. Lin is well-versed in providing culturally sensitive care and effectively works with patients who speak languages other



than English, carry trauma, or are unfamiliar with medical processes in the U.S. This synergy between Catholic Charities and the dedicated doctor enhances the overall quality of care and support available to refugees.

The issue of cost becomes even more pronounced for refugees supporting family in another country. They find themselves torn between paying for the exam or sending money to desperate loved ones in the beleaguered home country or in a refugee camp. Alongside financial stress, refugees face a scarcity of available interpreters and transportation, both of which are needed for the exam.

Catholic Charities of Oregon in the past secured a public contract that fully covered the cost of the exam for the agency's clients. But as public contracts often do, it expired.

The program proved crucial for a family of seven from Afghanistan, making it possible for them to stay together as a family instead of being separated. Before learning about the program, the family had to grapple with a difficult decision. Should just one parent undergo the medical exam and pursue a change in legal status, given their insufficient funds to cover all seven exams at a cost of almost \$40,000? The pending decision weighed heavily on their minds. However, thanks to the financial assistance secured by Catholic Charities of Oregon and to Dr. Lin, the burden of the medical exam costs was lifted, and the entire family could undergo the necessary examinations together, allowing them to proceed with adjusting their legal statuses collectively.

Before the publicly funded program, refugees had to seek alternative means to raise funds for their exams. However,

'These are times when people can get in trouble. We want to be there for them at that moment.'

-- Dr. Edward Lin

thanks to the program administered by Catholic Charities, they can use the extra money they earn to cover costs of legal counsel required for adjusting status.

The program served as an effective means to introduce the recipients to the array of services that Catholic Charities provides. Once refugees receive help for the exam, they are obligated to meet with a Catholic Charities refugee outreach specialist. During this meeting, refugees are informed about the additional services available and are guided toward accessing essential resources like health care and public transportation. This approach ensures that the beneficiaries gain comprehensive support beyond the immediate financial assistance, promoting a holistic approach to their well-being and integration into the community.

Despite the end of public funding for the pilot program, people continue to inquire about it. Catholic Charities remains committed to the vision of finding the aid once more, enabling the agency to continue its crucial mission of assisting individuals in obtaining lawful permanent resident status.

Dr. Lin hopes to remain a partner in this mission. When he was a child, his family emigrated from China to the U.S. He enjoys meeting people from all over the globe and helping them get settled medically.

"I look at it as people in transition between places, between financial stability and instability and between insurance," Dr. Lin said. "These are times when people can get in trouble. We want to be there for them at that moment."



A nurse and patient confer during an October health fair at Kateri Park apartments, a Catholic Charities Community.

Health fairs are good medicine at housing sites

At the more than 1,200 affordable apartments built and served by Catholic Charities of Oregon, the medical house call is not a thing of the past.

On a regular basis, Catholic Charities and Providence Health and Services organize health fairs in the common areas of housing sites so residents can get vaccines, have blood pressure checked, pick up health tips and ask pressing questions, even those that are long overdue.

“People say, ‘I haven’t been to a primary care doctor in years,’” said Sally Erickson, manager of Supportive Services for Catholic Charities of Oregon. Erickson has witnessed residents get tested for diabetes and learn on the spot they have it and need to manage the condition.

Providence is the workhorse of the health fairs, sending nurses to give shots, conduct consultations and answer questions.

“In this setting we can give people a lot more time and attention than we could in a clinic,” said Teresa Johnson, clinical operations supervisor for the health access community team at Providence. “This makes it more comfortable when you come to where they are.”

Contest draws 188 submissions

Congratulations to our Christmas card contest winners:

- Gia Radlinski, grade 6, Holy Redeemer School, Portland
- Genevieve, grade 4, St. Francis School, Sherwood
- Jane Larsen, grade 6, Holy Redeemer School, Portland
- Finny Zibilich, grade 7, Holy Redeemer School, Portland
- Ceci Di Salvo, grade 7, Holy Cross School, Portland
- Sophia Francesconi, grade 2, All Saints School, Portland

Here’s a link to all 188 submissions for your viewing pleasure: www.flickr.com/gp/137988819@N04/1R6cVA0SL3



A silhouette manger scene with powerful sunset colors by Gia Radlinski, grade 6, Holy Redeemer School, Portland



An angel with swooping lines, motion, and a wink by Genevieve, grade 4, St. Francis School, Sherwood



A circular medallion with star, shepherd and attentive sheep by Jane Larsen, grade 6, Holy Redeemer School in Portland

REFUGEE MAKING PROGRESS

Olena Leschynska, a refugee from Ukraine, spoke last March at Catholic Charities of Oregon’s annual gala.



“Catholic Charities has come alongside us during this terrifying journey,” said Olena, who sheltered with her teen daughter in a Kyiv basement when Russian bombs started pounding the city in February 2022. “Catholic Charities has calmed our fears. And helped us to process, reorient, connect and navigate this new reality. We have formed community, learned English and found work. Though we hurt, we feel hope.”

Now, she is an English student at Portland Community College and is looking for work in retail or in

a pharmacy. She’s also learning to drive.

“This is good, very good,” Olena said of her feelings about her progress.

Last summer, her daughter came for a visit from college in Austria. That was a joyous moment, Olena explained.

See a video about Olena’s escape and life in Oregon here: youtu.be/kL4D51mylso

Have a story about Catholics reaching out to those on the margins? Contact Ed Langlois, Catholic Charities communications director, elanglois@ccoregon.org or 503-539-6333.



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