

Matthew 25



July 2024

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

Catholic Charities

'It's freedom, a chance to expand'

Catholic Charities refugee team partners with local organization that provides free bicycles

More than 50 Portland-area refugees served by Catholic Charities of Oregon will be rolling through summer with new or refurbished bicycles, helmets and locks. That's thanks to a consortium of cycle-minded nonprofits.

The volunteers from Reborn Bikes want to share their two-wheeled joy with people who otherwise couldn't afford it.

Joe Kurmaskie, executive director of Reborn Bikes as well as leader of Hillsboro-based WashCo Bikes, calls the guild "The Fellowship of the Chain Ring."

The cycles handed out this year at Catholic Charities include top brands like Trek and Specialized. Adults and children now have reliable Portland-style transport.

"We want to make cyclists," said Kurmaskie, crescent wrench in hand after having just lowered a seat to fit an Afghan girl's lanky legs. "It's freedom, a chance to expand their peer group."

Kurmaskie said that success for children in music or sports often depends on their ability to make it to practice and events. For a family without a car, bicycles can be the difference.

"Together, we really have an impact," said Kurmaskie. The group refurbishes and sends out about 10,000 bicycles per year, always



Joe Kurmaskie, executive director of Reborn Bikes, helps an Afghan girl fit her new bicycle at Catholic Charities of Oregon.

along with safety gear like helmets, lights and locks.

The group estimates that by re-using and giving out bikes, they keep about 90,000 tons of CO2 from getting into the atmosphere.

As he speaks, Kurmaskie holds the handlebars of a sloping Trek that he said would be in a landfill it weren't for Reborn Bikes.

In addition to the bike giveaway, the organizations provide classes on safe riding and even organize youth cycling camps with rides, goofy fun and a free cycle at the end of camp.

Fraternal organizations like the Kiwanis and Optimists send trained volunteers on bike days to make sure bikes fit well and all is snug.

Refugees are excited about their new mode of transport, which many prefer to buses and automobiles.



Kurmaskie and volunteer Lee Ravenscroft help refugee Sheriben fit his new bicycle.

"I feel great," one man said in a note to Tanja Brady, Health and Orientation Instructor for Catholic Charities. "I rode from Catholic Charities to my house. It took only 48 minutes, and I enjoyed it a lot. I needed to relax and that helped me."

Help for the heat

As the July heat wave approached, Catholic Charities gave out and posted information ahead of time and posted information on social media about local cooling centers and other resources.

The agency runs heat survival workshops at its affordable housing buildings in the summer and turns on a misting device at its office when it gets hot.

Street outreach workers pass out flyers, gallon bottles of water, battery operated fans, cooling towels and the information sheet.



A client collects fresh fruit amid the misters at Catholic Charities.

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Catholic Charities Partners,

I am so proud of the work that Catholic Charities of Oregon is doing! There are so many good things happening. I would like to share these with you. Here is how, with your help, individuals are blessed each day at CCO:

Our client “Mary” relocated to Chiles House after living in our shared houses. The community living aspect was difficult for Mary given her mental health issues and the struggles with other housemates. When Chiles House opened, Mary moved in.

During her stay, she began treatment for an aggressive form of cancer. She has been able to work with both her case manager, Victoria Waldrep, and our peer support specialist Ann Marie. We provided support for Mary including caring for her cats when she was in the hospital, bringing her food, checking in via telephone and assisting her with applications for permanent subsidized housing. Mary’s name just came up for a permanent unit in a senior building where she and her cats can relocate and receive the additional services they offer.

Mary doesn’t have much family to rely on and our hope is that she will build a new community in her permanent home where the our staff will continue to check in with

her after move-in. The support of the Catholic Charities team and programs has helped Mary through some of her toughest days and we hope that in her move she will find the safety and security that she has been seeking. That will allow her to concentrate on her health recovery journey.

The Catholic Charities USA Healthy Housing Initiative Year Four Report has been released. Please take a minute to review the report and read what CCO has been working on with CCUSA. Congratulations belong to the staff working on this project. It involves both Resident Services, headed by Sally Erickson and Rose Bak, and Caritas Housing, headed by John Tamminga. This team has done a great job of partnering to ensure we develop communities that contain ongoing support for our residents. It’s our way of maximizing the benefits of stable housing. Services include health fairs, case management, resident services coordination, food pantries and much more. You can check it out here: <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/HHI-Year-Four-Report.pdf>

More great news: The Mental Health Association of Oregon will be moving into our building on Sept. 1. MHA offers services

for those with mental health and addiction challenges. What a marvelous opportunity this presents for clients of both programs. Our building, which now has Stone Soup on the first floor, has become a partnership of providers serving the most vulnerable, giving us all a better chance of creating lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. God has created a new and innovative solution to our community’s needs. Pray that God continues to grow these partnerships to His glory.

These are just some of the life affirming ways God is working at Catholic Charities.

Blessings,
Natalie Wood
Executive Director

Natalie Wood



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.



To read the extended versions of these stories, visit: catholiccharitiesoregon.org