



notes

catholic charities
OF NORTHEAST KANSAS

Benedictine Students Provide Tax Help

Three Benedictine College students are using the knowledge they've gained in class to give back to the Atchison community. As volunteers for Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas' **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)** program, they are providing basic tax preparation services free of charge.

The VITA program is available to those who make \$54,000 or less or persons with disabilities who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns.

During February and March, the students filed 35 tax returns with refunds totaling \$24,578. "VITA allows many people who may have considered it unaffordable, to have their taxes prepared," says sophomore Mary Claire Peterson. "Oftentimes, as a result, they receive a refund."



Student Catherine Hegarty helps with tax preparation.

The students heard about the hands-on volunteer opportunity through their tax accounting professor. For out-of-state sophomore, Catherine Hegarty, it was a way to get to know the community. "I really love it. I'm able to apply what I'm majoring in and feel like I'm making a difference in my home away from home," she says.

Junior Michelle DeBry agrees. "I was interested in this opportunity because of the overall experience I would receive in the tax world, as well as the chance to interact and serve the Atchison community," explains DeBry.

Catholic Charities began offering the VITA program last year in Leavenworth. Due to the positive response, the program expanded to Lawrence and Atchison. During February and March, a combined total of **174 returns were filed**. "To date, those **returns have generated \$150,385**," reports Isaac Uzcanga, Lead Program Specialist and VITA Coordinator. "That's money going back into the community."

The program would not be possible, adds Uzcanga, without the support of volunteers.

"I can tell this program is important by the gratitude that has been expressed by everyone who has participated," says Peterson. "They always say how thankful they are that we are able to offer this service."

"They Inspire Me!"

Hope Hero Shout Out!

Nearly 1,200 volunteers walk through the doors of Catholic Charities each month with the purpose of helping others. What they often find though, is that it is nearly impossible to lift someone else up without feeling a little inspired themselves. This is the case for Karen Camarata, a volunteer tutor since January 2015 for Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas' Citizenship classes.

Karen and her husband were long-time Catholic Charities' donors who had also assisted with seasonal events. Before volunteering for the Citizenship classes, however, she didn't have much familiarity with all the programs offered by the organization. When Karen found herself with some free time, her mind turned to Catholic Charities. Coincidentally, a posting asking for volunteers for the new Citizenship program, appeared in her church bulletin.

"I thought it was a good place to start," says Karen. "It was new, and I like meeting people with different backgrounds."

Although a nurse by trade, Karen quickly discovered her teaching ability. In the last two years, she has dedicated over 220 hours to helping individuals achieve their goal of U.S. Citizenship.

"She is a very positive, energetic and dedicated tutor," boasts Tracy Fuller, Citizenship Program Manager for Catholic Charities. "The students love her. Whenever our staff observes her classes, the students are laughing and enthusiastically working on the lesson."



Karen Camarata



For Karen, the reward is reciprocal.

"They inspire me!" exclaims Karen. "I had the privilege of tutoring a middle-aged Somali woman and her 20-year-old daughter. I held the 20-year-old's newborn daughter as we reviewed facts about the War of Independence. I was suddenly struck by the recognition of the courage it took for the matriarch to bring her family out of violence to a new country and of the sacrifices she had made. Surely it was all worth it to see her daughter and granddaughter grow up in freedom and safety! I am honored to be a small part of the process."

To learn more about our Citizenship classes, visit: catholiccharitiesks.org/citizenship-classes
For more information on how you can volunteer for this or other programs at Catholic Charities, visit: catholiccharitiesks.org/volunteer

Check Out Catholic Charities' Section in Osage City Library

With over 12,500 square miles, the service area of Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas is vast. And because those in need can't always travel to one of our eight Emergency Assistance Centers, we take our services to them through our Mobile Resource Buses.

For the past four years, a Catholic Charities' case manager, aboard one of the Mobile Resource Buses, has traveled to Osage City to provide rent, utility, food and clothing assistance to their local and surrounding community. Unfortunately, with so many miles to cover, Catholic Charities' presence in Osage City was limited. That is, until our Outreach team connected with Jeanette Stromgren, Director of the Osage City Library.

Stromgren generously offered up space in the library to serve as a "pop-up" food pantry and clothing closet, as well as a place to conduct healthy cooking demonstrations. Additionally, Fr. Larry Bowers, pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Osage City, garnered local volunteer support from the parish to help staff this extra endeavor.

Camille Pickhinke, Catholic Charities' Parish & Community Outreach Coordinator, helps train the volunteers to assist those in need. Local volunteers run the food pantry and clothing closet. They also provide books, diapers and fresh produce.

"This is a great opportunity to be a presence in the rural communities and to equip volunteers with an avenue for 'neighbor to serve neighbor'," says Pickhinke.

During a recent training, Pickhinke and volunteers, Kathy Lincoln and Dee Thompson, were able to assist 13 families with food and clothing. Case Manager, Jacob Schooler, was also on hand to provide rent and utility assistance.

Stromgren says the library is happy to team up with Catholic Charities and help those struggling in Osage City. "Our partnership with Catholic Charities expands the services they have been providing for years in our community. They are an additional resource locally in helping meet the needs of families and individuals," concludes Stromgren.



WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Family Volunteer Opportunity

Are you looking for a service activity to do as a family? How about spending some time together on a Saturday lending a hand at TurnStyles, a ministry of Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas. You will assist by sorting and hanging the generous clothing donations we receive throughout the week. Most of all, you will help other families who rely on our thrift store to clothe their children, as well as themselves. Children must be at least 10 years old to volunteer with a parent.

To sign up, visit: <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/70a0e48a8a828aa8-turnstyles>



Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas

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Looking to volunteer?

Contact Michelle Carlstedt at **913.433.2080** or mcarlstedt@catholiccharitiesks.org