



WORKS OF CHARITY

Early Impact. Lasting Hope.

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A young mother's journey forward

Bringing support closer to students

*Preparing the next generation
of caregivers*

Serving neighbors in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Sheboygan, Racine,
Fond du Lac, Kenosha, Walworth, Dodge, Washington & Ozaukee Counties

A Young Mother's Journey of Growth and Support

When Heather learned she was pregnant at 19, she faced many questions about her future and whether she was capable of being the parent she wanted to be.

She also spent years trying to understand her own story. Born in China, she had been left by the side of the road as an infant before being adopted in the United States.

"It took me 18 years to realize that was trauma," Heather reflected. She found herself thinking more about her experiences and asking difficult questions about parenting, adoption and the future.

To provide her with more support, the clinic she visited referred her to Catholic Charities, and our caseworker Sophie reached out to Heather. What began with conversations grew into a trusted source of support during her pregnancy and beyond.

As Heather worked through decisions about parenting and her future, she also faced health concerns during her pregnancy. Surrounded by support from her family, healthcare providers and Catholic Charities, she no longer felt she had to face those challenges alone.

Heather asked Sophie questions about everything from infant care to child development. Through Catholic Charities, she gained practical knowledge, confidence and compassionate support as she prepared to welcome her son.

Looking back, Heather says pregnancy and parenthood changed her in ways she never expected. "I have matured so much more," she said. "I can now take care of not only me, but the baby." Today, the young woman who once questioned whether she was ready to become a parent is confidently caring for her son and planning for the future with hope and new possibilities.



"It's been great getting to help her in this journey into motherhood and seeing her grow."

— Sophie, Catholic Charities
Pregnancy Case Manager



Camryn is prepared to take the lessons she learned at Catholic Charities into her career.

A Future Social Worker Finds Her Path

While earning her master's degree in social work at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Camryn spent the past year interning with Catholic Charities child welfare programs, working alongside staff in adoption services, pregnancy and parenting support, and supported parenting.

The experience challenged her in new ways.

"It helped me get comfortable working with people and doing home visits, which I was a little bit apprehensive about," Camryn said.

"After a while, I was doing it by myself and had my own caseload."

The experience also strengthened her confidence in herself and her future. "It really showed me that I'm capable of more," she said.

Meeting Students Where They Are

A generation ago, a child struggling with anxiety might have suffered quietly. Today, many young people face pressures that previous generations never experienced, from the lingering effects of the pandemic to the constant influence of screens and social media.

At St. Mary Parish School in Menomonee Falls, Principal Annemarie Wood sees those challenges every day. "The number one need I'm seeing in most students is anxiety issues," she said. "Students are feeling pressure from things that typically we had not seen as a pressure moment previously. A lot of it is self-image, and it's showing up even at a very young age."



Catholic Charities therapist Brodie speaks with Annemarie Wood, the principal at St. Mary Parish School

Across the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, school leaders are seeing the same trend.

"I believe there is a great need for this type of support in our schools," said Mary Tretow, Associate Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. "Not all of our schools have guidance counselors, and we consistently hear from principals that children and families often face long waits to get an appointment with a therapist or other mental health professional."



This fall, Catholic Charities launched a pilot School-Based Mental Health program at **St. Mary Parish School** in Menomonee Falls, **St. Frances Cabrini School** in West Bend, and **Marquette University High School**. By bringing licensed therapists into schools, the program helps bridge the gap between students in need and timely access to care.

At St. Frances Cabrini School, Principal William Waech sees the program as filling an important need. "More and more schools have added school counselors to their staffing, but they are hard to find and not all schools can afford to have someone on staff," he said. "We were one of the schools that has not been able to afford to do so, and Catholic Charities is making this possible."

For Annemarie Wood, the program is also about helping students and families view mental health care as a normal and healthy part of life. "Everyone has a need to talk to somebody. Therapy can be normal for everyone," she said.

When support is available in the school, students can receive help sooner, families face fewer barriers, and educators gain a partner in caring for the whole child. Catholic Charities therapists also provide consultation, training, and mental health education for school staff.



A Note of Gratitude

The School-Based Mental Health pilot was launched with support from **United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County** and expanded in Washington County through the generosity of **United Way of Washington County**, **Otto Bremer Trust**, **West Bend Community Foundation**, and **West Bend Insurance Company Foundation**.



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