



Near Southwest Side interns pose for a picture in front of the arch in Little Village before collecting signatures. (Summer 2023)



Englewood-Greater Chatham interns collect signatures on a rainy summer day. (Summer 2023)

## US Bishops and CCHD Work to Address Mental Health Crisis

In October 2023, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) announced a campaign focusing on mental health in response to rising levels of mental illness and related challenges that many in the country now face following the COVID-19 pandemic.

BY RHINA GUIDOS

The USCCB said the efforts are “to raise awareness on this important issue, remove the stigma of mental illness and mental health challenges, and advocate that those who struggle receive help.”

The bishops’ worries are well-founded. The Pew Research Center conducted surveys at the start of lockdowns in March 2020 and again in September 2022. Pew’s March 2023 report on its findings included troubling statistics about how the

pandemic has affected the mental health of the US population:

—At least 4 in 10 adults reported experiencing elevated psychological distress at some point between March 2020 and September 2022.

—The survey also found that more than a third of high school students reported experiencing mental health difficulties during that time frame, with a high percentage describing feelings of sadness and hopelessness that they experienced

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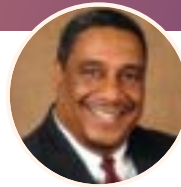


Through the CATHOLIC  
CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT (CCHD) of the  
United States Conference of  
Catholic Bishops (USCCB),  
Catholics and friends of CCHD

across the country help poor and low-income  
Americans to help themselves and their  
communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, CCHD has contributed over \$462  
million to nearly 12,000 low-income led,  
community-based projects that strengthen  
families, create jobs, build affordable  
housing, fight crime, and improve schools and  
neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects  
develop community leadership and participation  
so their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting  
and effective, and so CCHD's investment in  
people will help break the cycle of poverty.  
CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes  
of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between  
impovertised and affluent persons.

LETTER FROM



THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

A new year brings new opportunities to help our brothers and sisters. In this newsletter, you will read about the Catholic Campaign for Human Development's support for two organizations' efforts to improve mental health services, particularly among the underserved in our country.

Recent surveys are reporting the negative mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for our youth as well as adults. Though we have learned to live with the virus in a new world, we are still gauging the pandemic's effects after so much loss of life and what feels like lost time. We are reassessing our role in helping those who are having a harder time adjusting than others.

Thanks to the generosity of those who support our work, some CCHD-funded organizations—well before the world knew what the coronavirus was—were well-positioned to respond to mental health challenges that arose, particularly in the pandemic's early days.

By providing mental health-care services, using their networks to share information about telehealth options to safely access those services, and organizing to keep facilities funded in underprivileged communities, no doubt these organizations soothed souls and saved lives.

This newsletter features the work of two CCHD-funded organizations in Chicago and California that have fought for long-term change in their communities. They fight so that when others deal with inner turmoil, they are not alone. They have access to resources in their times of struggle.

Recognizing these struggles, the USCCB spent a significant part of its November 2023 meeting discussing the importance of providing spiritual as well as science-based healing to those who suffer. On November 15, CCHD subcommittee member Bishop John Dolan of the Diocese of Phoenix bravely spoke to his brother bishops about losing three siblings to suicide, including a sister just this past year.

"Obviously, this has made an impact in my own personal life," he told them.

As a result, he has launched ministries dealing with mental health in the dioceses where he has served, and to his brother bishops he urged the need for funding such efforts.

A CCHD-supported organization in California began advocating for mental health resources after hearing from people who lost loved ones to suicide.

Like Bishop Dolan, the community felt the need to help those suffering and to maintain mental health resources in the long run. People want to support such work, Bishop Dolan said, and they want to talk about it, particularly to remove the stigma that may prevent others from seeking and receiving help.

"People want to see us doing something impactful," he said.

At CCHD, we are guided in our work by Jesus, the ultimate healer, for this important mission. We thank members, like Bishop Dolan, who are shining the spotlight on mental health and the need to fund it.

We include more of his brave commentary in this newsletter.

**RALPH McCLOUD**, Director  
Catholic Campaign for Human Development

You can be part of CCHD's critical work by donating at Mass or through your parish's online giving platform. #iGiveCatholicTogether also accepts funds for CCHD. Visit: <https://usccb.igivecatholictogether.org/organizations/usccb-catholic-campaign-for-human-development> to learn more.



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almost daily for two or more consecutive weeks.

—Parents who answered the survey listed mental health as their top concern when it comes to their children’s well-being. Three out of 10 also expressed worries that their teenaged children’s use of social media might lead to anxiety or depression.

—Parents of children in the K-12 system also said that the pandemic’s first year negatively affected their children’s emotional health as well as their education.

Even before the pandemic, the USCCB’s Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) saw the need to support organizations that focused on mental health, particularly programs that provide aid and organize underserved communities to demand those services in their localities.

In Chicago, CCHD funded the Coalition to Save Our Mental Health Centers, a local organization that—true to its name—has worked to restore, expand, and fully fund mental health services in the city since 1991.

The organization started when Chicago’s then-mayor and the local department of public health announced a plan to close centers that provided mental health services, blaming the closures on cuts in the state funding for the facilities. Subsequent city leaders made further cuts, whittling down the number of city-run mental health centers from 19 to 12 over a 10-year period.

But the coalition fought back. It organized local citizens, faith leaders, providers, other professionals, and those who needed the services. It united these stakeholders in a grassroots effort to demand legislation to create a “community-centered model of mental healthcare,” based on expanded mental health services programs (or EMHSPs), to restore some of the services.

“We asked people to ask their neighbors if they’d be willing to pay a small property tax increase to create a new community mental health center in the neighborhood,” said Michael Snedeker, the coalition’s executive director.

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In 2014, the first such center opened in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago. Two years later, the coalition organized once again to support a ballot referendum authorizing a center in another neighborhood. It, too, passed. To date, such efforts by the coalition have led to the opening of six centers in Chicago, said Michael.

When COVID-19 arrived in 2020 and in-person mental health services became limited, the centers continued to provide help via telehealth, or video visits. The remote services became a critical resource for the community, Michael said, but not a lot of people knew they were available.

Coalition members mobilized to spread the word about the services, given the uncertainty about what was and was not available during the pandemic’s confusing first months.

“Churches and schools and community groups in the area made sure that they were able to refer people,” Michael said. “There was definitely an increased need.”

“There were people who were seeking services. At the same time, we had other challenges because you had people who had been going to the centers or going to other places, and now they were cut off from those types of things,” he explained.

Residents needed time to adjust to the new systems for telehealth visits that limited physical contact to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

“Early on in the pandemic,” Michael said, “using things like Zoom and telehealth and stuff like that was something that was not as common. Obviously, that was something that we kind of all adjusted and adapted to.” He recalled that these apps and tools were not familiar even four years ago. “For people to learn to use those things and even have the resources



Logan Square, Avondale, and Hermosa Governing Commission host a groundbreaking ceremony for their new center. (August 2023)



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to use them, it actually took a lot of effort.”

CCHD funding was critical for keeping the work of the coalition going during that time, Michael said. “It certainly helped us weather the storm of uncertainty that had arisen during COVID, not just as an organization, but also just in terms of mental health services. You know, the clinical programs.”

Another organization, Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, known as COPA, worked on similar efforts in California’s Santa Cruz and Monterey counties thanks to CCHD funding.

pressures and worries their communities were facing.

“And they heard many, many, many painful stories” concerning mental health, Liz said. “Families talked about mental health concerns, particularly among teenagers. And then there was one parishioner at an Episcopal church whose teenage son had died by suicide. That became the catalyst for those institutions to come together and say, ‘We have to do something about this.’”

COPA organized an action with the county supervisor, Liz said, and obtained the official’s commitment to address mental health resources and mental health funding

At their 2023 fall plenary, the Catholic bishops of the United States discussed the issue following a presentation on the mental health campaign by Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, who chairs the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester, who chairs the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth.



Bishop John Dolan

CCHD subcommittee member Bishop John Dolan of Phoenix, who founded a mental health ministry after losing family members to suicide, said that simply having the

conversation in the dioceses where he serves “has opened up doors for people.” Simply because the topic has been raised, “thousands are responding,” he said during the discussion. Talking about mental health is essential, he said.

“They’re so very happy that leaders are now opening up doors for conversation,” he said. “I’m very happy to have this conversation. We know that mental health impacts people in the military services . . . you, Archbishop [Gudziak], can tell story after story about people suffering from PTSD in Ukraine. We know this is a struggle. And then of course we know that the youth and the young adults are struggling. What we’re talking about is a need for us to truly, honestly, celebrate the field of science, particularly the field of psychiatric science, and we need to help up their game.”

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We know this is a struggle. And then of course we know that the youth and the young adults are struggling.  
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COPA, which builds coalitions and develops leaders, works with faith-based and civic institutions to address issues of housing, health care, mental health, immigration, public safety, economic opportunity, and education.

Liz Hall, supervising organizer for COPA, said that CCHD funding allowed the network to mitigate the large gap between rich and poor in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

“It’s a destination for the affluent,” she said. “We have the best golf courses, hotel resorts, retreat centers.” But the region also has a lot of farm workers who harvest the abundant crops of lettuce, artichokes, garlic, “and all kinds of different things that sit on our dinner tables all across the country,” Liz said.

In COPA’s partnerships with the area’s Catholic parishes, other Christian churches, and synagogues just before the pandemic, the work led to conversations about community needs. Organizers asked the congregations to share some of the

in that community. As a result, when they met to follow up with the official, they learned that leaders from a prominent health-care provider were coming to visit.

“There was an opportunity, because [the provider] had to negotiate a contract with the county to be able to operate,” Liz said. “Because of that action with their public official . . . they had a meeting where they shared their story with the administrators.”

The visiting administrators listened to them, and ultimately they entered into a contract with the county to allocate millions in health benefits for low-income communities, Liz said.

This great resource now supports underserved families in the aftermath of the pandemic.

“There’s a lot of mental health pressure on youth and young adults,” Liz said, pointing to pandemic isolation and cultural and social stresses as leading factors. “We hear a lot from parents who are very, very concerned about that. And from the youth themselves.”



AN INITIATIVE OF THE  
CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR  
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Americans live in poverty.*

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