

Catholic Charities Commemorates 40 Years of PREPARES, Supporting Babies and Families

Spokane, Wash. - One of Catholic Charities Eastern Washington's (CCEW) most popular and impactful programs, PREPARES - Pregnancy and Parenting Support - formerly known as CAPA - commemorates its 40th anniversary this year. Those involved with the program over the years gathered at the PREPARES offices on June 12 to mark the milestone by sharing memories while noting its tremendous success.

PREPARES offers supportive services for parents and caregivers to build loving bonds with their children helping them build healthy futures, walking with families as they nurture their children from pregnancy to the child's 5th birthday. Today's inclusive services incorporate essential supplies, parenting classes and support groups, case management for moms and dads, English as a Second Language support for caregivers, play groups, breastfeeding counseling, music programs and more.

From its earliest iteration in the 1940's, offering support to single mothers and adoption services for newborns, the program has blossomed into one of Catholic Charities' most beloved and widely respected programs. All are welcome to participate in the meaningful services, supports, educational programs and commitments the program offers mothers, fathers, and families as they nurture their children through pregnancy and early childhood.

"By any name, and any measure, this program is as vital, tangible and impactful as any work we do," explains CEO Rob McCann. "Thousands of families have been positively changed by this work over the years. We have the same mission and utilize shared funding with the PREPARES state-wide program. We align our efforts with other Catholic organizations in Washington, including the Catholic Bishops of Washington, which developed the state-wide program to underscore the value of all human life."

PREPARES is distinguished by the extraordinary involvement of volunteers. The PREPARES Family Center, operated by staff and volunteers on Fifth Ave in Spokane, works with 45 active parishes across the diocese. Individual parishes work on their own and in concert with other near-by churches to

involve parishioners in this distinctive ministry, demonstrating the power of love and acceptance to families who need and welcome such support. More than 320 volunteers across Eastern Washington are directly involved. They host baby showers and raise money for car seats. They maintain diaper banks, and secure toys and clothes to share with families who cannot afford their own. They sponsor resource fairs to help families connect with other services, bringing friendship and support to young, growing families.

State-wide, three Catholic Charities agencies – Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, Catholic Charities serving Central Washington, and Catholic Charities Eastern Washington assist parishes in setting up the ministry and in training parish coordinators and volunteers. In-depth training is offered for those willing to act as companions – walking with a woman or family throughout pregnancy, childbirth and those first crucial years, listening to them, guiding them, and connecting them to needed resources.

“We know our first encounter is critical when working with families,” explains Ellie Toone, director of PREPARES. “We give out diapers and clothing and formula to address essential needs. What sets us apart are the relationships that emerge. It feels different here – they feel our welcome and our love.”

“We care deeply about parents and we’re parent-focused,” Toone continues. “We know that when parents’ emotional cups are empty, they often have little to give their children, so we work to fill their cups by offering non-judgmental love and support.”

One such example is The Circle of Security, an 8-10-week program developed in Spokane, which is considered a ‘parenting blueprint’ course. “Parents who attend often come to recognize how their own needs were met, or not met, in their origin families,” Toone explains. “It’s about understanding that we can change the way we respond to our child’s emotional needs by reflection. We provide a safe haven for that reflection to occur and a launching pad for healthier attachments with their children.”

Lisa Green, CCEW’s vice-president of Family Services, and long-time leader in the program, notes the pro-life foundation of the program.

“As Catholics, we are called to walk with families who have chosen life,” she shares. “We live out our faith by being pro-living. We value and cherish all life, whether that is a newborn or a struggling parent. We honor and promise to be there for them after the baby is born. That’s what this program is about!”

“The friendships developed here can be life-long,” she continues. “One of our volunteers and a client who met through our program recently celebrated their sons’ 30th birthdays together. That was special! Everyone who participates is enriched by this program.”