Adoption

Catholic Charities has been creating families in Southern Minnesota for over 75 years. We are a child placing agency licensed in Minnesota. Our licensed social workers provide domestic infant adoption services, international adoption services, and designated adoption services. In domestic infant adoption, our social work staff helps to facilitate the match between birthparents and adoptive couples and assist with the process of freeing the child for adoption and placement of the child in the adoptive home, as well as the supervision of the adoptive placement through the adoption legalization. The adoption staff is committed to providing support and guidance throughout the entire adoption process both to the adoptive couple and the birthparents. We have a supervised provider agreement with Holt International of Oregon to complete international adoptive home studies and provide post placement supervision with Minnesota residents living in our service area who want to adopt internationally. Designated adoption services are provided to adoptive applicants choosing not to be a part of our domestic adoption program, but are in need of individual services such as a study or post placement services. We offer a quarterly “Journey to Adopt” educational support group for our families who have completed the adoption study process and are ready to adopt. We are proactive in our efforts to make sure both adoptive parents and birthparents have a full complement of services. In every adoption, the welfare of the child is of primary concern.

Adoption program service fees are paid by adoptive couples and designed to cover the operating expenses of the program. To eliminate cost as a barrier to adoption, a portion of the adoption fees are assessed on a sliding scale based on household income with a minimum and maximum cap. Any deficits are supplemented by general contributions to Catholic Charities. The majority of children are placed directly out of the hospital into the adoptive home. There are a number of different ways domestic infant adoption happens. Pregnant women may come to the agency looking to place their child in an adoptive home, which has always been a service option, and we are ready to assist both the adoptive parents and birthparent in that process. Another way in which adoptive parents and birthparents are making a connection is through personal connections or social media platforms. Women placing their children for adoption do so because they want more for the child than what they can provide. During this reporting cycle, 64 people received adoption services.

Catholic Charities Adoptive Families share in their own words what adoption has meant to them:

“Adoption is the greatest blessing in the world! That level of love and trust is guided by God’s hands. It was the best choice we ever made.”

“Our journey to adopt has already had some highs and lows but we try to remember that we’re not the first – and we won’t be the last – to take this journey. Thanks to Catholic Charities, we are often reminded we’re not on this path alone. We attend informational meetings with other couples waiting to adopt and we’ve developed friendships with these other special people. We talk about our plans to adopt openly with friends and strangers, which inevitably has led to people sharing their stories of adoption with us. This advocacy is very important work - we believe families come in all shapes and
sizes. A strong family is not tied together by blood and genetics; it’s tied by people who love and support each other.”

**Post Adoption Service**

Post Adoption services are provided to adopted adults, birthparents, adoptive parents of minor children, and genetic siblings, who may choose to engage in a search process with the agency. As a licensed adoption agency, Catholic Charities keeps every permanent adoption record for the families and birthparents we have worked with. Post adoption services include answering requests for medical or background information or an actual search for contact with the other party. Fees are charged. Assistance and counseling is offered to all who come looking for services. Catholic Charities adheres to Minnesota statutes and rules regarding post adoption search and records. We are committed to providing information and guidance in the post adoption journey. During this reporting cycle, 139 people received post adoption services which included intermediary exchanges between birthparents and adoptive parents or birthparents and their adult children.

**Pregnancy, Parenting, and Adoption**

Catholic Charities believes in caring for the gift of life and provides positive alternatives to abortion. We have been providing services to pregnant and parenting women for over 75 years. We offer free, confidential support for those who are pregnant. We help women and men thoughtfully decide between parenting or adoption so they can confidently pursue the best plan for themselves and their babies. A pregnancy information line is staffed by agency social workers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Our Pregnancy, Parenting and Adoption program offers tangible help and a sense of hope during times of crisis. Women faced with an unplanned pregnancy receive the support needed to self determine what will be the best plan for their baby. If the expectant parent chooses to make an adoption plan for their child, Catholic Charities assists the birthparent by offering counseling and decision making support, help in selecting and meeting an adoptive family, determining how much openness they want, and making a plan for the hospital time and their future. If the expectant parent chooses to raise their child, Catholic Charities will provide support to make a parenting plan, parenting education, and access to baby items such as a free pack n play, diapers, and wipes.

The Mother Child Assistance Fund helps women to carry their baby to term and helps women with babies by providing the direct support they need to work through difficulties they are facing. Financial assistance is available for rent, utilities, and other needs. Support for the Mother and Child Assistance Fund is raised through our annual Baby Bottle Campaign each October, during Respect Life Month. Churches, schools, and other groups distribute empty baby bottles to individuals and families. The bottles are filled with change and the proceeds support our direct assistance fund all year long. We provide baby items and free pack n plays through a partnership program to any family in need so that their baby has a safe place to sleep. We aim to improve family stability and self sufficiency through the provision of financial literacy education, safe sleep education, and shaken baby prevention. A Nurturing Healthy Families parenting group is offered monthly in three office locations.

Since 2006 Catholic Charities has been the recipient of a Positive Alternatives Grant through the Minnesota Department of Health. Our program services clearly support the goals of the grant which are to encourage and assist women in carrying their pregnancies to term, in caring for their babies after birth, and to provide accurate information on, referral to, and assistance with securing necessary services.
During this reporting cycle 1,572 people received pregnancy, parenting and adoption services. Here are quotes from birthparents who received services from our program:

“Receiving this grant will improve my families situation immensely. We will be able to move forward and pay rent on time. As stated previously, I have never received emergency assistance, my significant other and I are truly hard working just went through a rough few months.”

Onward and Upward
The Onward and Upward Program began in 2016 and served 43 individuals this past year. This program helps low income single parents and expecting single parents complete their education in the healthcare field from Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC). Beyond the educational achievements, Onward and Upward helps participants secure employment and begin earning, for the first time ever, a livable wage. This will propel these young families to break the cycle of poverty by fostering financial stability and self-sufficiency.

Onward and Upward represents a high commitment/high reward approach to helping young families escape poverty for the long run. Because of this, applicants accepted into the program are carefully assessed across fifteen categories covering everything from housing to transportation to child care. This assessment carefully considers the needs of both the parent and the children. Recent research indicates that a two generation approach greatly enhances the probability of achieving positive outcomes. In the process of conducting this assessment our Licensed Social Workers begin forming a therapeutic relationship with potential participants where they will assess their personalities, their motivations, and their prospects for success.

Our Licensed Social Workers are the mentors on the journey with these students. They meet with students enrolled in Onward and Upward on a bi-weekly basis. At these regular meetings our staff monitors progress, identifies potential issues and opportunities, solves problems, provides life skills training, makes referrals, and addresses unexpected non-academic financial challenges by tapping into the resource pool designated for such purposes. In addition to emergency financial assistance, each Onward and Upward participant receives a monthly scholarship throughout the program.

In addition to benefitting from these traditional social work services, every participant receives training through our Financial Literacy Program and the opportunity to learn good time management and discover their personal learning style. Each mentoring relationship is individualized to meet the student’s particular needs.

Once a student graduates, they are able to stay with the program for approximately six more months. During this time their social worker offers support through interview and resume writing skills, budgeting with the new income, and support in achieving personal goals. The overriding goal of Onward and Upward is to help pregnant and parenting women complete their education and achieve family financial stability and self-sufficiency. We use the following outcome benchmarks to know our clients are on the road to sustainable success:

1. Employment at a job that pays a livable wage
2. Assuming an appropriate level of debt
3. Building savings equal to three month’s worth of living expenses
4. Exiting government assistance programs

A quote from one Onward and Upward participant:
“My experience with Onward and Upward has been such a blessing. College is hard, nursing school is even harder. It’s important to have as much support as one can have – that’s what I felt here! I thank all who have donated to this scholarship program. Knowing I had some extra money coming in was comforting. Another form of support. I have and will continue to recommend this scholarship program to others.”