



## CATHOLIC MULTICULTURAL CENTER PROVIDES WELCOME, SOCIAL SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS FROM 55 COUNTRIES IN 2023

by Laura Green

True to the ‘multicultural’ in its name, the Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC) has served immigrant individuals and families from 55 countries so far this year.

“As conflicts and crises around the world cause more people to come to America to escape violence and economic deprivation, CMC is here to welcome them, assure that they have a strong start in Madison, and help them become integrated into our community,” said CMC Director Steve Maurice.

F.B.D. arrived in the U.S. in 2019 from The Gambia in West Africa as an asylum seeker. After an error in an attempt to file her work authorization application resulted in a processing standstill that lasted three years, she found herself unable to work, with no savings, and homeless. As a single mom, she and her two children ended up living with her sister because she had no means to pay rent. Then, F.B.D. sought help from the CMC immigration legal services program. CMC Attorney Carmel Capati quickly filed a corrected work authorization application with USCIS. Several months later, F.B.D. finally received approval to work and a social security number. When she came to CMC to pick up her work documents, F.B.D. had tears of joy. She is currently enrolled in CNA classes and has applied for a job with an agency that assists adults with disabilities.

Many immigrants like F.B.D who seek assistance at the CMC are facing difficult situations: past trauma, language barriers, financial insecurity, and lack of knowledge of systems and services in this country. CMC aims to remedy these struggles with assistance in both the short- and long-term in the form of food, English classes, connections to employment, immigration legal services, and referrals to resources for housing, clothing, and other necessities.

Nicaraguan immigrant Danilo was one of 133 visitors last month to the CMC employment search assistance office. He arrived in Madison earlier this year along with his wife and one-year-old child.

He had found himself a living-wage job, but it was only seasonal. He would soon be out of work for the winter months and unable to make ends meet. So, he came to the CMC for help.

“I am looking for a job, any job, so I can pay my rent,” Danilo said. He is learning English and prefers to communicate in his native language of Spanish, so he needed to come to a place that was experienced in helping people who do not speak much English. The CMC welcomed Danilo and

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offered support to navigate the job search and application process so that he could achieve financial security for himself and his family.

Married couple Jin and Chang, originally from Taishun province in China, have been utilizing the CMC food pantry for over two years. They have lived in Madison since the 1980s, but now that they are retired and prices are rising, they need some help reducing their monthly expenses. "We come to CMC to take food, it helps a little bit," said Jin.

The pantry items Jin and Chang most prefer are fresh ingredients they can cook at home: eggs, oil, rice, meat, and fresh produce from the CMC food pantry garden. Both are avid cooks, and they go out of their way to share what they have received from CMC with others. It is not uncommon to see them arriving at the food pantry with hot, freshly cooked food to share with CMC staff and volunteers.

Through the comprehensive programs it offers, CMC has become like a second home for many immigrants from around the world like F.B.D, Danilo, Jin, and Chang. Venezuelan volunteer Jeliel Peña de First said, "The CMC is the place where I feel part of the community. Without a doubt, I can say it is my second home in Madison." She added that, "Here the doors are always open to help those who need it and no matter where they come from, they are treated with dignity."

"Catholicism teaches the importance of welcoming the stranger," said Maurice. "Our motto 'making a difference, one person at a time' is a big part of who we are as a Catholic agency and is something we will continue to emphasize." Whether through the caseload of 600 immigration clients, English classes for 100 plus students annually, or job search support to over 100 of visitors each month, CMC is truly making a difference in the lives of our immigrant neighbors.

CMC invites the community to be a part of this mission of welcoming immigrants from around the world by participating in the 12th annual Radiothon fundraiser and community celebration with La Movidia radio on Friday, December 8th, hosted at the CMC (1862 Beld St, Madison). For more information, visit [cmcmadison.org/radiothon](http://cmcmadison.org/radiothon).

CMC offers its thanks to the local businesses who have donated to support services for immigrants at CMC as part of the Radiothon – [Event Sponsors](#): Cleen Trax Maintenance

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