



# Griffin Family Opens Home and Hearts to Refugee Family, the Noors

*When Mark and Katherine Griffin wanted to make a specific impact on the refugee community, Catholic Charities connected them with the Noors, a refugee family from Afghanistan. Despite culture differences and language barriers, the Griffins initiated a friendship with a single family, seeking to make a difference in a small, yet meaningful way.*

## How did you become involved with Catholic Charities?

My husband and I made the decision that we wanted to get involved with the refugee community in a specific way, so I asked my company's coordinator if she could refer me to a charity to help us. She put us in touch with Catholic Charities, and the rest is history! The agency has been very responsive in helping us match our desire to help with a family who could benefit from help – so thank you!

## What made you decide to help a family?

Our family has always supported various charities financially, but we wanted to give more personally. We work full time and we have three young children, so we wanted an opportunity that allowed us to share the experience with our children and on a flexible schedule. We also want our children to grow in their empathy for others, and to hold an appreciation for all the privileges they enjoy. So getting to know a family with other children seemed like a good match.

We chose to become involved in the refugee community, as it felt like a population that we could most easily understand the factors that lead to their need for help. We enjoy great stability and peace in the United States, but had we been born somewhere else in the world, we could easily find ourselves in similar circumstances. We hoped that by initiating a friendship with a single family and investing in that family we could make a difference in a small, yet meaningful way.

## What was it like to work with a family?

The time we have spent with the Noors has been an incredible experience for our whole family. We started out by gathering a list (from Catholic Charities) of some of the things that the family needed before we met with them. One of the items they needed were shoes. The Noors have six children, and so we decided to take them to *Academy Sports + Outdoors* to buy sneakers for everyone. We were all set to get everyone measured when we arrived, but the Noors insisted on buying shoes that were a couple of sizes too big so that the children would have room to grow. They are so very careful with their limited finances, and so it



*(Noor interview continued on pg. 2)*

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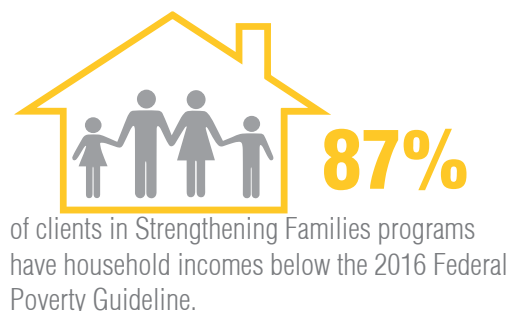
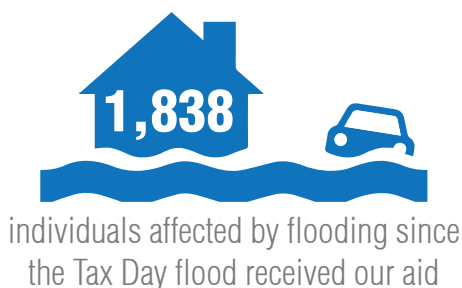
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## 2015-2016 HIGHLIGHTS - A Year of Mercy. A Bridge to Hope.





Dear Friends,

The wise book of Proverbs is full of verses calling us to care for the poor and needy - and to become their

voice and their advocates. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of the destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

We are told not to "crush the needy in court" (Prov. 22:22), and to do good for others when it is in our power to act (Prov. 3:27).

During this Year of Mercy, as declared by Pope Francis, Catholic Charities is providing thousands of vulnerable people in need a bridge to hope.

Scared, abused refugees have found a safe place to live and to thrive with the help of our team. Volunteer lawyers from Exxon and elsewhere have joined with our Cabrini team to ensure immigrants are treated fairly and can have their life-changing day in court.

Our staff members, volunteers and board members are receiving recognition in the community for their dedication, compassion and excellence in dealing with floods, in helping people navigate the legal system, in counseling students and partnering with the schools, and more... and we celebrate a few of them in this newsletter.

While we offer many programs and do all we can to serve Greater Houston, we can't do it alone. Whether partnering with the City of Houston, United Way and Exxon or our generous supporters and partner organizations, we know

God is at work among us. Together, we help people in need change their lives - and become empowered to create a sustainable future for themselves and their families.

St. Vincent de Paul believed that "to serve the poor is to serve Jesus." We are honored to serve such a high calling, and we thank you for joining us in our vital work.

In the Peace of Christ

*Cynthia N. Colbert*

Cynthia N. Colbert, MSW  
President/CEO  
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

## Noor Family cont'd.

really is a pleasure to help them with some of the "extras" that are beyond their budget.

After our first visit, I shared the rest of the list of things they needed on our neighborhood Google group. An unbelievable number of donations poured in from our neighbors and we had to recruit a neighbor to help us haul the load to their apartment. We filled an entire minivan and SUV! Through this, we had the opportunity to meet a few neighbors we did not know, as they dropped donations off at our house and asked about our efforts to help. It was humbling to see how much "extra" we all have, and very satisfying to share it with a family that could really use it.



Since then, we have alternated visiting with the Noors at their apartment or hosting them at our house for lunches, and taking them out to experience different things in Houston. It was certainly interesting to experience some local culture through their eyes! Also, birthdays are not normally celebrated in Afghanistan, so when their twin boys turned 13, we threw an American-style birthday party at a park playground, complete with pizza, cake and presents.

The meals the Noors have served us when we visit them for lunch have been phenomenal. In their culture, extended families live together, and they often invite large groups to dine with them. So Wazeera (wife/mother) is accustomed to cooking for a large crowd.

### What was the biggest challenge?

Definitely the language barrier. Only Iqbal (husband/father) speaks English fluently. However, it is amazing to watch our children play together, completely unhindered by what we would consider a lack of ability to communicate. I have been working to learn



their native language Pashto in hopes that I can help bridge the gap.

### What was the best/most rewarding part of your experience?

There are a few things: Getting to step outside our comfort zone to experience a new culture and get to know a family from such a completely different background, while



## Noor Family cont'd.

only traveling across town, and getting to share this experience with our children in one go. Whenever we say goodbye to the Noors, we are filled with a remarkably deep sense of fulfillment.

There's something about reaching far outside of yourself that is incredibly rewarding. Finally, we're motivated by the belief/hope that we can make a difference in a unique and powerful way outside our immediate circle of influence.



**You mentioned you were learning a new language. What has that been like?**

Challenging – definitely! I enjoyed studying foreign language while in school. I even continued in my studies to get a minor in German while in College. However, Pashto is an Arabic language, so I can't even read the letters!

I really enjoy practicing my very limited Pashto when we visit with the Noor family. The children, particularly, seem to find it



amusing. It gives me an appreciation for what they are experiencing, and particularly how difficult it is to acquire a new language as an adult. Afghans represent the single largest refugee population in the world, so my hope is that by investing in learning Pashto, I will be uniquely able to provide meaningful assistance to additional Afghan refugees in the future.

**What have you learned from the Noors?**

The Noors have given me an appreciation for how very little we actually need. Iqbal only makes about \$300 more per month than rent for his family, but he manages to provide everything they absolutely need. The children are friendly and happy. Iqbal works a night shift so that he can be around to help his family as they need him during the day, since he is the only English speaker (doctor appointments, school appointments, etc.). He has enrolled at a community college to obtain a degree so that he will be able to get a better job in the future. It is inspiring to watch him and his family work so hard to make a life for themselves here.

*"We have heard that the biggest single factor for refugee families settling successfully is having a personal connection with someone already established within the community. We hope we can help the Noors achieve that success."*

**What do you want other people to know?**

God loves all his people. I think every major religion calls for its followers to show mercy and love to one another. What we are doing is nowhere near radical, but I believe it's a step in the right direction. If more people made a conscious effort to make a difference, I think we could actually make this world a better place.

## CEO Receives Two Significant Community Awards

It's been a busy summer for CEO and president Cynthia N. Colbert, MSW. After being named a finalist in the Houston Business Journal's First Women Who Mean Business Awards in the spring, Colbert received additional recognition for her leadership.

Leadera Consulting Group named Colbert as September 2016's Outstanding Woman

in Business, an honor that selects exemplary leaders in the community.

She was also selected as a finalist for the Houston Business Journal's 2016 C-Suite Awards in the Best Nonprofit CEO category. The second annual awards program recognizes Houston's top leaders in the nonprofit and for-profit space. A panel of outside judges selected the finalists based on



their contribution to company success, civic involvement and career achievement.



# Catholic Charities' Program Leader Named to 40 Under 40 List

Catholic Charities Counseling Services Program Director Ernesto Lopez was named to the Houston Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Class of 2016.

Lopez, who has been with Catholic Charities for the past eight years, was selected for this honor out of more than 500 nominees.

"To be recognized for the work you do is truly humbling," Lopez said. "I'm honored to receive this award, and I share it with the Counseling Services team at Catholic Charities who I'm proud to work with every day."

Lopez is a National Certified Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the State of Texas, Approved LPC Supervisor by the Texas State Board of Examiners, and a Certified Clinical



Trauma Professional by the International Association of Trauma Professionals.

Under his direction, the

Catholic Charities' school counseling program has become a gold standard for other programs across the country. Working alongside the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston's Catholic Schools Office and a Friend of Catholic Charities that would like to remain anonymous, the program has shown improvements over the past three years in the academic performance and classroom behavior of students initially rating low in these areas on a standardized assessment tool.

For his efforts, he received the Catholic Charities Service Award in 2013.

In 2015, this Catholic Charities program was recognized as an exemplary case study in a national study by The Catholic Partnership Project for Better Early Childhood Development and The Catholic University of America. This project was also selected for presentation at the 2016 Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering in Boston, which focused on strategic partnering with local community leaders to strengthen inner-city Catholic schools.

## CultureMap Names Cabrini Supervising Attorney a Top Texan Under 30

Catholic Charities' Mariame Aana, supervising attorney at the St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigration Legal Assistance, was selected by CultureMap as one of the Top Texans Under 30.

For the first time, CultureMap celebrated twentysomething trailblazers by naming 26 individuals the Top Texans Under 30, recognized as the state's budding power players.

Driven to help immigrants live the life of their dreams, Aana oversees Cabrini Center's pro bono program and coordinates the program's outreach efforts. Proficient in French, Spanish, and Arabic, Aana is also learning Mandarin, and she has an MBA in addition to her law degree.



She uses these skills and her passion for service to help DACA applicants, legal permanent residents seeking

citizenship, and others make a life for themselves in the United States.

CultureMap solicited nominations from the public, narrowed down the finalists, and chose 26 dynamic Texans who impress with their innovation, dedication, and leadership, regardless of industry or cause.

## Catholic Charities Continues to Meet BBB Standards

The Better Business Bureau of Greater Houston & South Texas recently approved Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston as meeting the "Standards for Charity Accountability" under the BBB's Philanthropy Review Program.

Catholic Charities was determined to meet the BBB's comprehensive charity standards, which go above and beyond requirements of the law and show the public that the organization is working to maintain donor confidence by being transparent and accountable. Standards for charity accountability include board oversight, effectiveness reporting, program expenses, budget planning, donor privacy, annual reporting and more. Catholic Charities met the 20 Standards for Charity Accountability.

The BBB reviews and evaluates local charities for compliance with the BBB Wise Giving Alliance on charity accountability standards to assist donors in making informed giving decisions.





# Yashika Olgesby: An Exemplar of Success Thanks to the Lotus Project

Yashika Olgesby was born to a mother who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. Unable to raise her three daughters, Yashika's mother sent her children to live with her aunt and three cousins. Coming from a household ruled by mental illness, this transition was especially hard for Yashika and her sisters. Yashika described her aunt's method of child rearing as, "spare the rod, spoil the child." Feeling unloved and unwanted, Yashika ran away from home and found herself pregnant by fifteen.

Yashika then turned to the Navy as an opportunity to seek a better life for herself and her family. After her discharge, Yashika experienced a high risk pregnancy and found that civilian life brought challenges with which she would need help coping. Without a support network and forced out of her job by her difficult pregnancy, Yashika found herself homeless.

While waiting for assistance from the VA Hospital Homeless Healthcare program, Yashika found her way to Catholic Charities' Villa Guadalupe Short-term Housing for Women Veterans facility. There she was able to find a temporary home for herself and her children, and the resources necessary to get back on her feet. With the help of the social workers at the Villa Guadalupe, Yashika was able to complete the 12-week Career Skills Building Course. She was able to find a job as an Uber driver, and has



enrolled in school to earn her license in chemical dependency counseling. Yashika has proven extremely dedicated to her studies and can often be found utilizing her car as a quiet place to study.

Yashika is a proud mother of four, and a strong advocate for women veterans. With the help of the dedicated professionals at the Villa Guadalupe facility, Yashika and many women veterans like her have been able to achieve self-sufficiency and prosperity.

## Lending a Hand...

**FMC Technologies** visited the Catholic Charities Guadalupe Center on Aug. 10 for the Veterans Day of Caring.

The company donated linen and curtains, and assisted with decorating the Therapeutic Center for Play for Veteran Children.



**Members of the ExxonMobil Foundation Team Volunteer Involvement Program,** Catholic Charities staff and women veteran residents at the Villa Guadalupe Transitional Housing facility rolled up their sleeves on July 8 to help log 294.5 volunteer hours at the Catholic Charities Guadalupe Basic Needs Center.

The volunteers assisted with painting, landscaping, cleaning, power washing stairways and sidewalks, organizing the food pantry, laminating signs, refinishing furniture and more.



## Scanlan Foundation to Match Christmas Fundraising

***This year the Scanlan Foundation will match up to \$90,000!***

We are happy to share that once again the Scanlan Foundation has generously agreed to provide a *dollar for dollar match* during our Christmas fundraising season.

For more than 15 years the Scanlan Foundation has been doubling the impact of your generosity through our annual Christmas Appeal, making it possible for Catholic Charities to provide help and create hope for tens of thousands of people in need throughout the year.

So acknowledge the Scanlan Foundation match in your donation this Christmas giving season and get ready to double your impact!





# More than 60 Houston Attorneys Attend DACA Workshop

Volunteers from around the Houston area donated their time on the morning of Oct. 6 to attend a Continuing Legal Education workshop and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) training at Acres Homes Multi-Services Center with Houston Volunteer Lawyers, Exxon-Mobil and the St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigrant Legal Assistance at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

Catholic Charities trained 67 attorneys at the event on how they can provide DACA and citizenship services. A workshop followed the training session where a total of 104 clients were assisted with the DACA process, including 23 original applicants and 81 renewal applicants.

Catholic Charities staff members work with volunteers at monthly in-house workshops where they receive training prior to assisting applicants with the completion of their immigration applications. During a one-year period, the program files approximately 400 DACA cases and

assists around 1,000 citizenship seekers. With only a handful of staff members, more than 100 active volunteers enable this work to continue.

The Cabrini Center is the largest nonprofit immigration legal service provider in Houston. Accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals, the Cabrini Center is dedicated to providing high quality, low-cost and pro bono legal services to low-income immigrants and refugees who would otherwise not be able to obtain legal representation.

Cabrini's Pro Bono Program provides legal services to DACA applicants, Asylum-seekers, Unaccompanied Refugee Minors, Cuban Parolees, Refugees and other cases. The Pro Bono Program's staff engage in outreach that impacts thousands of clients each year. This impact is made possible through the efforts of hundreds of pro bono volunteers including attorneys, law students, interns, and other community members.

Visit [www.CatholicCharities.org](http://www.CatholicCharities.org) for more information on the Cabrini Center's pro bono program and other volunteer opportunities.



## Catholic Charities Announces New Leadership Team, Presents Charity in Action Awards at Annual Meeting

Mayor Sylvester Turner, philanthropic leader Deana Blackburn, KTRK ABC13's Cynthia Cisneros and ExxonMobil's Donna Petrone were among the 100 attendees for the September 20 Catholic Charities Annual Meeting & Celebration.

Cynthia N. Colbert, MSW, Catholic Charities president and CEO, perfectly captured the theme "A Year of Mercy, A Bridge to Hope" as she described how the staff and volunteers are called to show God's mercy by helping those who are hurting, downtrodden and in need of help and restoration – thus providing a bridge to self-sufficiency.

Last year, Catholic Charities served 82,154 clients through its programs ranging from refugee assistance and foster care to financial aid and healthcare.

Board of Directors Chairman John Kafka, president and CEO of Chamberlin Roofing and Waterproofing, thanked the outgoing board members and welcomed the 2016-17 Board of Directors and Advisory Board members.

The 2016 Charity in Action Awards were presented to these outstanding supporters in the following categories:

**Supporter: ExxonMobil** – accepted by Donna Petrone, Exxon's Counsel and Chair and Co-Coordinator of the Houston Pro Bono Committee, for its commitment to providing immigration legal aid to those in need.

**Parish: St. Michael Catholic Church** – accepted by Fr. Wayne Wilkerson, Pastor, and Fr. Jeff Bame, Parochial Vicar, for their help in providing housing and essential supplies to refugees seeking a stable home.



**Volunteer: Rene Mouldoux**, retired ExxonMobil international litigation attorney, for his commitment to providing legal aid through the legal clinics offered through our Cabrini Center.

**Junior Charity in Action: Barettes for Books** – inaugural award presented to Corpus Christi Catholic School students Analys Barinaga, Zoe Barinaga, and Helena de la Cruz, founders of Barrettes for Books, which provides books to the children living at the Villa de Guadalupe.

"We were delighted to honor such outstanding individuals for their charitable service and their hearts for others," Colbert said. "They support our mission to provide help and create hope for those in need."







## Donates Funds for Thanksgiving Turkeys at Guadalupe Food Fair

This year HEB has generously agreed to contribute to Catholic Charities' Saturday Thanksgiving Food Fair at the Guadalupe Basic Needs Center. Their gift will go towards providing nutritious Thanksgiving meals to Houston's most vulnerable residents. With the help of organizations like HEB, Catholic Charities works to fulfill our vision of being people of faith helping people in need achieve self-sufficiency and live with dignity. Thank you, HEB!



Join us for our 23rd Annual Share Your Blessings campaign and touch the lives of thousands of people! Help extend the joy of Christmas to those in need by collecting donations, gift cards, toys, and more.

You can help by:

- donating gifts for children aged infant to teen, or gift cards as stocking stuffers
- arrange a toy drive in your parish, through your employer, or with family and friends

Volunteer to help sort and organize gifts by contacting 713-874-6645 or [Volunteer@CatholicCharities.org](mailto:Volunteer@CatholicCharities.org).

We are now accepting gifts at our Midtown office: 2900 Louisiana St., Houston, TX 77006

# #GIVINGTUESDAY™

**Save the date #GivingTuesday for Nov. 29!**

#GivingTuesday is a global day of giving fueled by the power of social media and collaboration.

Celebrated on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving and the widely recognized shopping events Black Friday and Cyber Monday, #GivingTuesday kicks off the charitable season, when many focus on their holiday and end-of-year giving.

**Visit [CatholicCharities.org](http://CatholicCharities.org) to see how you can make a direct impact**



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providing access to an exclusive underwriter reception where guests will take a keepsake family portrait with His Eminence and indulge on Paulie's famous treats.

Event proceeds benefit Catholic Charities' children and family services. Visit [www.CatholicCharities.org](http://www.CatholicCharities.org) for more information and to reserve your table.

Join us at River Oaks Country Club on Saturday, December 10, 2016 from noon - 2:00 p.m.

While this family Christmas luncheon caters to our little guests, adults enjoy sipping on poinsettias, mimosas, and champagne followed by a delicious seated lunch. Each table purchase will include a Christmas activity bag for each child, a 2016 commemorative gift, and a scrumptious menu for children and adults.

Table purchases at the \$5,000 level or above enhance your experience by guests will take a keepsake family portrait with His Eminence and indulge

## kNOW POVERTY



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January is Poverty Awareness Month. In observance, we are hosting our third annual kNOW Poverty summit, focused on finding answers and creating solutions.

For more information, contact Matt Johns, Director of Mission Integration, at [MJohns@CatholicCharities.org](mailto:MJohns@CatholicCharities.org) or 713-874-6659.

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For more information, contact Debbie Godfrey at 281-202-6220 or [DGodfrey@CatholicCharities.org](mailto:DGodfrey@CatholicCharities.org).



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