



# PATRON

Easter 2025

CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES OF SOUTHERN NEBRASKA QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



## ST. FRANCES OF ROME

CSS Team

2025 Patron Saint

Saint Frances of Rome, you loved God with all your heart and served Him at every stage of your life. Please pray for me, that I may learn how to serve God within my vocation, never seeking anything other than His holy and perfect will. Saint Frances of Rome, pray for us! Amen.

#HopeintheGoodLife

## Providing the right resources

Jennifer Hinze - McCook FSS Coordinator

In my short time with CSS, I've experienced many people in need. I've seen the homeless at the Lincoln office, coming in for a cup of warm coffee on a really cold day. I've encountered a mom desperately needing diapers for her baby. And I won't forget the gentleman living on the streets who lost his blanket and gloves. When visiting the Imperial location, I remember the mom coming in the thrift store who didn't speak English who needed clothes for members of her family.

In the McCook/Imperial area, most of the people in need have been phone calls or referrals from other agencies in the area. You can tell a lot by that voice on the phone as it can convey a lot of information. Such as the elderly woman who needed utility assistance after a major surgery. She was so happy to have someone to talk to and provide reassurance that assistance is available. I may have been the only person she talked to all day.

Recently, I had a phone call from a single mom of 3 children. I could tell by her voice that she was feeling helpless and scared. She'd recently suffered a miscarriage and had surgery. She'd fallen behind in rent and needed to move as she was fleeing from domestic abuse.



Her plan was to move out of state to be with family. I worked with her landlord and another agency in McCook and we were able to help her relieve the burden of her rent. She was extremely thankful.

I often receive calls for non-monetary assistance. Recently a client called looking for home health. She'd suffered a stroke many years ago and just needed help with daily duties around the house. After many phone calls, I was able to connect her with a home health worker who comes to the home to help her a few days a week.

Even if I don't get to meet these clients in person, I can tell they are smiling and happy that I was able to help them. From the homeless seeking warmth to the single mother fleeing abuse, the connections I've made, even over the phone, are significant. **My ability to listen and provide the right resources—whether it's for a warm meal, rent assistance, or home health care—is deeply meaningful.** They're wonderful examples of bringing Hope in the Good Life to Southwest Nebraska.

### Inside this issue:

A Lost  
Boy Finds  
New Life



Power  
& God's  
Light



More than  
just a  
sandwich



# A Lost Boy Finds New Life

**Katie Patrick**  
**Executive Director**

Springtime is often associated with new life and fresh beginnings. After a long, cold winter, nature reawakens—birds chirp, flowers bloom, and the grass turns green. In my backyard, for example, our rose bushes, which struggled last year near our Marian statue, are beginning to show signs of hope. Just like those rose bushes, there are many people in our community who are given the chance to grow and rebuild, no matter how difficult their past has been. **One such person is Jacob**, a young man who, after more than a decade in federal prison, is navigating his own journey of transformation with the help of Catholic Social Services and RISE.

At Catholic Social Services (CSS), we are privileged to work alongside organizations like RISE, which provide transformative support for individuals like Jacob. RISE is the largest nonprofit in Nebraska focused on helping individuals in prisons and those reentering society, giving them the tools to succeed, heal, and break free from the cycles of incarceration.

Jacob's story began nearly 30 years ago when he arrived in the U.S. as one of the 'Lost Boys' from Sudan. In the late 1980s, the conflict between the Khartoum-based government in the north intensified with southern Sudanese rebels. Though the South would eventually earn their independence (2011), the cost of it would take thousands of lives and displace millions more.

Often referred to as the “Lost Boys”, tens of thousands of children, many orphaned or separated from their families, fled their homes, and walked hundreds of miles through dangerous terrain, facing starvation, dehydration, attacks from wild animals, and the threat of gunfire to escape the violence. Once they arrived at refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, many were resettled in western countries including the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Their transition and integration into American culture, including Lincoln, NE, was difficult.

Jacob's integration story in Lincoln was not without struggle. Choices he made led to criminal activity that ultimately placed him into the federal prison system for more than a decade. The gamut of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual warfare defined his sentence. After some years of anger and resentment, Jacob connected with the in-prison programming of RISE. There, he met Bryan Dahlberg, a RISE staff member and ardent Catholic evangelist. His path toward forgiveness and redemption started to manifest. **Jacob experienced God's unconditional love and by the time he was released, hope had reentered his life.** Thanks to the compassionate case management from Maeve Hemmer at RISE and the team at CSS, Jacob was not alone in his efforts to rebuild his life.



CSS was first connected to Jacob after a Lincoln priest encountered him at mass and referred him to us. We quickly made the connection with Bryan Dahlberg at RISE, who himself previously worked at CSS and knew Jacob. Together, we met with Jacob in support of his reintegration. While RISE assisted Jacob in a move to Omaha to be near his cousin and his support network, CSS offered immigration legal services by helping him renew his documents as well as securing a donated vehicle for him.

Recidivism often happens when isolation, and familiarity, which often means reverting to that which led to incarceration, take over. Jacob's cousin was a crucial part of his success in staying out of prison, and so was securing employment. For several months things were going well until one day, Jacob was detained by ICE and his deportation to South Sudan was scheduled. His social support network in Lincoln and Omaha was devastated. **But as with all things, God has a plan.**

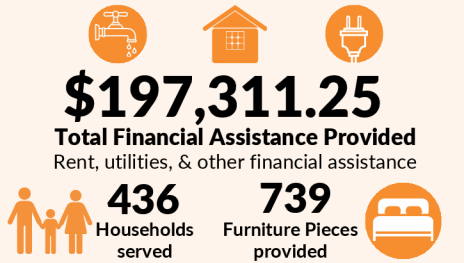
Within a few weeks, Jacob left the U.S. and arrived in South Sudan. Several “Lost Boys”, who previously returned, of their own accord, to rebuild their home country were informed of Jacob's homecoming. We are all hopeful that he will receive support in finding employment and setting up a new life in South Sudan. Additionally, many family members, who Jacob hadn't seen since he was a child, greeted him with open arms and joyous smiles. A few hours after Jacob's arrival, we received this email from his cousin in Omaha. “Jacob arrived safely in South Sudan. They called me a few minutes ago. He is finally a free man. He is in great spirits.”

God works in mysterious ways. **Similar to the rosebuds in bloom, so too are our lives.** Pray that Jacob's second chance, now free from many of the barriers he faced in the U.S., brings him love, prosperity, and, most importantly, hope—hope in a new beginning and in all the things God has planned for him.

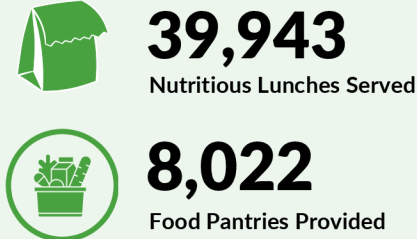


# JAN-DEC 2024 CSS IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

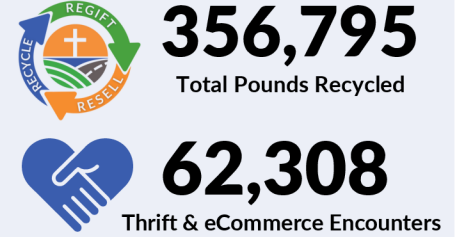
## FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES



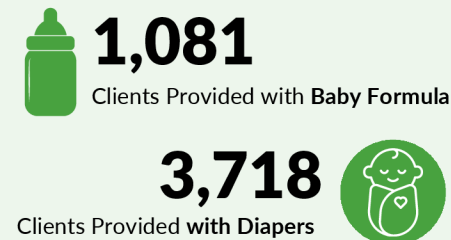
## FOOD MARKET & MEAL SERVICES



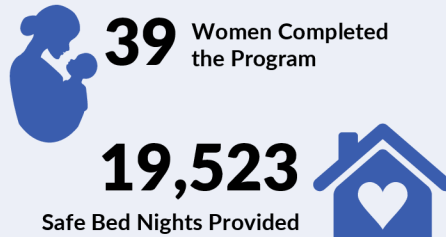
## SUSTAINABILITY



## CLIENT RELATIONS



## ST. GIANNA PROGRAM



## REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT & IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES



Join us IN PRAYER

Recently, a woman who lived at St. Gianna Women's Home a few years ago gave me a call. I've heard from her a handful of times over the years, as she shared different updates or asked for guidance with situations. This time, however, she began the call a little more nervous than usual saying, "Veronica, I'm sorry to be bothering you with this, but I just don't know what to do."

She shared with me some new information that she discovered a couple of months previously, and abuse that her daughter had suffered at the hands of her husband. She began crying as she explained that despite everything her and the children had been through, this was by far the most painful.

We talked for a while as we explored options in a number of areas: therapy for her and the children, legal action she had already taken and that she would need help with moving forward, and how to resolve the rent payment that she was worried she might not be able to make on time. Most importantly, we set up an ongoing support system - including our St. Gianna's team - to make sure that she is well accompanied as she begins all of the next steps, many of which will be very difficult to take.

Frequently we see stories like this where, even years after the abuser is physically absent from the life of the woman, they continue to find ways to inflict damage. Sometimes it is through taking away the things that are most important to her, such as the custody of the children. Other times they show up to places of work, causing a scene which results in termination or threatening them. **Many times, unfortunately, it includes the pain that comes from discovering things that happened in the past, during the relationship.**

It is heartbreaking to watch how years of progress and healing can begin to crumble, even when the abuse - be it present or past - is inflicted from a distance. Overcoming the wounds caused by domestic violence is a process that, for many of our women, begins anew each day. Each moment of success is not without an enormous struggle. Even when they move out of St. Gianna Women's Home, it is not automatically an "easy" path forward. Oftentimes the best thing we can do is believe them and believe IN them, and walk alongside them as they fight for each victory - large or small. **And the most important thing we can do - whether they are aware of it or not - is pray for them**, so I ask each of you reading this to please join us in this mission: praying for all of those affected by domestic violence, be it past or present.

Veronica Pino, St. Gianna Program Manager



"I don't know what we'd do without you." **At CSS, these words resonate deeply, reminding us of the vital role we play in our community.** We're constantly striving to better serve those who rely on us, and one significant way is through facility updates. Auburn's conversion to LED lighting is underway, promising a brighter, safer future for our clients, volunteers, and staff.

A recent incident involving a smoking fluorescent fixture at St. Francis Gift & Thrift highlighted the urgency of this change. Thanks to grants, an EnergyWise incentives program, and the generosity of our donors, we're replacing outdated lights with energy-efficient LEDs. This isn't just about lighting; it's about safety and sustainability.

LED conversions offer numerous benefits, including energy savings, a longer lifespan, improved lighting quality, environmental advantages, durability, and versatility. These advantages translate to lower electricity bills, reduced maintenance (less ladder climbing!), and a more welcoming atmosphere. **Given CSS's commitment to sustainability, this decision was straightforward.**

CSS operates the largest food market in the area, serving a rural community with a poverty rate higher than the state average. Since 2021, we've seen a 180% increase in food pantry distribution, with nearly 30,000 pounds of food distributed last year. In addition to food, we provide personal care items, winter coats, diapers, baby formula, gift cards, and financial assistance. In 2024, St. Francis Gift & Thrift recorded 7,280 register transactions of affordable housewares, 28,546 items sold, 1,429 donor transactions, and 2,304 volunteer hours. Clearly, our historic building houses vital resources for the community! The LED upgrade will lower energy costs, allowing us to allocate more funds to support our services and create a more inviting space for everyone.



Providing assistance for this electrical project is reminiscent of a past experience where we restored power to a family in need. Four years ago, a phone call connected me with a family in desperate need. A ten-year-old girl named Siera bravely translated for her grandmother, who spoke Spanish. Their electricity had been shut off on a terribly hot summer day. Siera's mom was at work. Her baby sister was crying as we conversed.

When I later informed them their power was being restored, their gratitude was overwhelming. Siera's bravery and the family's relief resonated deeply, reinforcing the importance of our work. **This project, along with others, allows us to continue offering essential resources and hope as we bring light to the world and God's light to others.**



## CSS Gardening Initiative for Refugee Families

Poe Dee, Refugee Resettlement Director

For many refugees, the dream of having a home with a backyard garden represents more than just a space to grow vegetables; it symbolizes hope, stability, and a connection to their roots. Unfortunately, most refugees find themselves living in apartments or rented houses, limiting their access to green spaces. For those in apartments, this reality is further compounded by the lack of available gardening opportunities. While some families renting houses may have the chance to garden with their landlord's permission, not all can cultivate their own plots, creating a significant gap in accessing fresh produce and fostering community bonds.

Refugees often arrive in their new countries with limited resources, facing the daunting challenge of rebuilding their lives from scratch. Many come from impoverished backgrounds, and the pursuit of stable employment and savings to secure a home with a backyard for gardening may take years.

As they adapt to their new surroundings, CSS wants to ensure that these families find ways to connect not only with their culture but also with their neighbors and community.

**Recognizing these challenges, the CSS Lincoln Community Garden is stepping in to provide a solution.** This year, the organization is excited to invite refugee families to engage in a community gardening initiative that allows them to plant and harvest their own vegetables.

Unlike previous years, CSS will operate the garden with a renewed focus on collaboration and empowerment. By establishing 4-6 family plots, each family will have the opportunity to cultivate a space tailored to their preferences and needs. The initiative is designed not only to provide gardening opportunities but also to encourage social interaction among families.

*(continued on back page)*



# More Than Just a Sandwich

Miranda Schumacher  
Hastings Development Officer

Growing up, I always told my mom she made the best sandwiches - plenty of mayo, layers of meat, a slice of cheese, all nestled between two pieces of soft white bread - delicious! She always laughed in response, saying "It's just a sandwich!" At the time, I appreciated the gesture but never had to think twice about whether we had enough groceries to make that sandwich. There was always bread on the counter and meat in the fridge. Fifteen years later, serving as the Development Officer at Catholic Social Services in Hastings, I now see how fortunate I truly was.

Here in Hastings, The Open Table Sack Lunch Program has been serving those in need for 21 years. Every Monday through Friday from 12 to 4pm., anyone can come to our door to receive a sandwich - no questions asked. In 2024, we distributed just over 31,000 lunches, averaging 125 meals per day. **This simple yet powerful program has made a lasting impact and represents a legacy of compassion and dignity that Hastings is proud of.**

Open Table is driven by generous volunteers in the community who desire to serve and support those in need. Local churches, organizations, and individuals regularly make sandwiches and prepare the sack lunches, ensuring the program runs smoothly day after day. **Catholic Social Services has housed the program for many years, and recently, Open Table officially became a part of CSS, now operating under the same 501(c)(3).** Each day, volunteers all throughout the community come to CSS ready to encounter those in need and feed the hungry, just as God calls us to.

Some volunteers make the sandwiches, while others fill each sack with granola bars, fruit cups, water, and other essentials. Others are there to greet those who come in for a lunch face to face. They don't just hand out meals—they take the time to learn names, hear stories, and build connections with the individuals and families who come through our doors.



*St. Michael's Elementary Students packing lunch sack during Catholic Schools Week*

**"I know what it's like to be hungry. It gives me great joy to be able to give back and it heals that wound. I love that it is a 'no questions asked' program and that it upholds the dignity of all those who walk through the door." - OPEN TABLE VOLUNTEER**

Open Table is about so much more than just a sandwich. It's about treating every person with dignity and compassion. It's about receiving the story of another, and loving them right where they are. It's about nourishing hope—one lunch, one conversation, one life at a time. It's about loving God's people. All of it, so much more than just a sandwich.

Give Hastings Day, a day of community support and philanthropy for Adams County, is on May 1st this year. **Catholic Social Services is proud to dedicate all funds raised to our Open Table Sack Lunch Program.** If you'd like to join us in our mission to Nourish Hope in the Good Life, you can donate anytime now through May 1st at [GiveHastings.org](https://GiveHastings.org). Together, we can make an impact that feeds the body, uplifts the soul, and reminds our neighbors they are never alone.

### CSS HASTINGS OPEN TABLE SACK LUNCH 2024 PROGRAM IMPACT

31,050  
LUNCHES  
OUT THE DOOR  
Feeding the hungry  
together

1,475  
VOLUNTEER  
HOURS  
Includes prep time and  
client encounters

71  
UNIQUE  
VOLUNTEERS  
We treasure your  
time & talent!

### Give Hastings Day

Live here.  
Give here.

### Nourish

Hope in the Good Life here.

[csshope.org/GHD](https://csshope.org/GHD)



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*#HopeintheGoodLife*

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(S.A.G.)

## The Patron

Easter 2025

### CSS Gardening Initiative for Refugee Families

*(continued from page 4)*

Many refugee families work long hours, often including weekends, as they navigate their new lives amid the demands of full-time employment. This busy lifestyle leaves little time for building connections with others in the community.

By inviting families to join together in tending to the garden, CSS aims to foster a sense of belonging and fellowship. In addition to offering the plots, CSS will provide essential gardening tools and seeds, ensuring that families have the resources they need to cultivate their crops successfully. With the rising costs of fresh produce, especially from international grocery stores, this initiative serves as an essential means for families to access healthy, home-grown vegetables. By growing their own food, they can save on grocery bills while also enjoying the satisfaction and health benefits of producing their meals. The community garden is more than just a space for planting; it's a vibrant hub for dialogue, celebration, and shared experiences.

As families come together, they will not only cultivate their plots but also foster friendships and support networks, creating a nurturing environment for both their gardens and their families. As CSS Lincoln Community Garden prepares for the growing season, the focus remains clear: to create a space where refugee families can thrive, build connections, and savor the fruits of their labor—one vegetable at a time. Together, they will cultivate not just a garden, but a resilient community rooted in hope and shared experience.

## UPCOMING CSS EVENTS



Give Hastings Day  
APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup> - MAY 1<sup>ST</sup>

Nebraska Catholic  
Day of Giving

APRIL 21<sup>ST</sup> - MAY 7<sup>TH</sup>



28  
JUN

Chase County  
Challenge  
(Smokin' On  
Broadway)



29<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Golf Classic  
& Cookout

15  
SEP