



A MISSION FOR *Hope*

A Newsletter by Catholic Charities Serving Central Washington

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PREPARES: Walking Alongside Families with Compassion and Dignity

When Alejandra, a young mother of three girls under age five, first joined the **PREPARES** Young Moms' Group in Yakima, she often felt the overwhelming and isolating weight of parenting completely on her own. "Motherhood can be wonderful and rewarding and messy and disgusting all in one day," she shared. "Some days are really hard, and I feel like my kids are somehow broken. But being here with other moms makes me realize they aren't broken. They're just being kids, and like everyone else, I am doing all I can to be a good mom."

Across Central Washington, **PREPARES**—which stands for **Pregnancy and Parenting Support**—serves nearly 4,000 *vulnerable families across eight regional counties* each year, offering a safe, welcoming, and judgment-free space for parents from pregnancy through a child's fifth birthday. Beyond emotional support and community connections, the program

directly addresses the quiet crisis of basic need insecurity.

Nationwide data shows that nearly 46% of families with young children struggle with diaper insecurity—a silent stressor that can prevent access to childcare, force parents to miss work, and cause severe health complications and emotional strain. For a family stretching every dollar, the average \$100 monthly cost per child creates an unsustainable choice between buying diapers or paying for basic household bills.

Through strong partnerships with local Catholic parishes across eight counties, **PREPARES** bridges this critical gap. Dedicated family companions and trained volunteers walk alongside mothers and fathers, hosting weekly play groups, organizing

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PREPARES

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community drives, offering peer support, and distributing essential supplies like diapers, wipes, formula, and hygiene items.

At the heart of **PREPARES** is the understanding that material support is tied directly to emotional health and family stability. When a parent receives a box of diapers or a bundle of essential supplies, it removes a constant source of panic, allows parents to maintain childcare, and reinforces their confidence during their child’s most critical developmental years.

Parish volunteers and **Family Companions** serve as the backbone of this mission, offering an unconditional relationship built on respect rather than transactional aid. Whether helping a new mom navigate community resources or providing a listening ear during a weekly support group, these volunteers ensure that no family walks through early parenthood alone.

“Poverty is not a lack of love or a failure of care,” explains Syndee Saucedo Cavazos, **PREPARES** Program Manager. “The birth of a child is a reflection of hope, and our goal is to walk alongside each family with compassion, respect, and dignity, removing the quiet stigma parents carry when they cannot meet every need alone.”

Right now, diaper supplies across our region are *critically low*. You can help local families by purchasing diapers and wipes through our **Amazon Wishlist** (a.co/eVJGOL7) or calling **(509) 946-4645** to volunteer as a **Family Companion**.



Play & Learn: Nurturing Early Connections

*For parents and caregivers with young children, navigating early childhood development can feel both rewarding and overwhelming. Catholic Charities’ **Play & Learn** program provides a welcoming, interactive space where parents, grandparents, and caregivers gather weekly to guide their little ones through crucial developmental milestones. Under the leadership of new program manager Luma Lloyd, these free sessions foster early learning, peer support, and family resilience across our region.*

*During each session, children explore hands-on activities that promote fine and gross motor skills, language acquisition, and social-emotional growth. Simultaneously, staff facilitate Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) screenings to help parents track their child’s unique developmental progress. When specific needs are identified, **Play & Learn** seamlessly connects families with specialized, long-term resources like **Parents as Teachers** (PAT) to ensure every child gets the right support at the right time.*

*Beyond developmental guidance, **Play & Learn** provides families with immediate relief by distributing essential basic needs, including diapers, wipes, and infant supplies. For many participating parents, the weekly gatherings become a vital lifeline—a place to share parenting triumphs and challenges, build meaningful friendships with other local families, and access comprehensive wrap-around services in a comfortable, community-focused setting.*

*To support local families participating in **Play & Learn**, community members can drop off donations of diapers, wipes, and formula directly at Catholic Charities’ main office on Tieton Drive in Yakima. Churches, businesses, or community groups interested in hosting a diaper drive or coordinating a donation drop-off time can contact Luma Lloyd at **(509) 215-4434**.*

*Financial contributions to support Early Learning programs can also be made conveniently online at **catholiccharitiescw.org/donate**.*

Kinship Program: A Lifeline for Families in Unexpected Circumstances

In Washington State, for every single child placed with a relative through formal foster care, *at least 19 children* are raised informally by kinship caregivers. These grandparents, aunts, and uncles step up in moments of sudden family crisis to ensure children remain in a safe, familiar home—often without advance notice or financial preparation. Operating across eight counties in Central Washington—**Kittitas, Yakima, Benton, Franklin, Columbia, Garfield, Asotin, and Walla Walla**—Catholic Charities’ **Kinship Navigator Program** provides emotional support, legal guidance, and tangible aid to help relative caregivers navigate these challenging, unpredictable journeys.

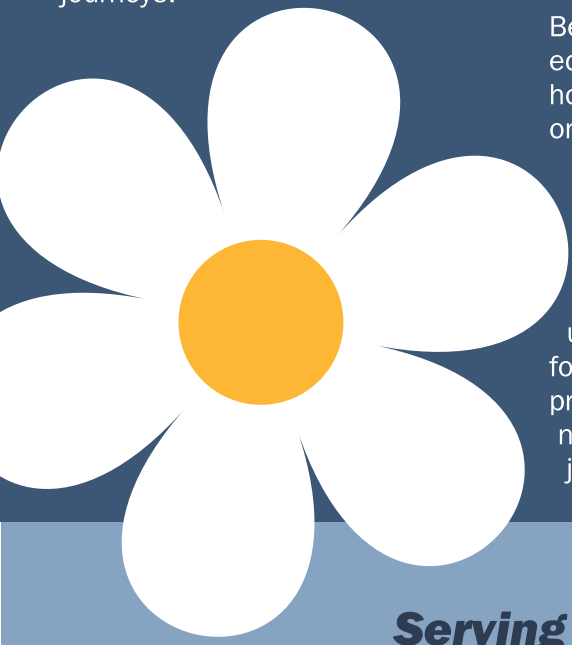
Because most kinship care happens outside the formal child welfare system, relative caregivers receive no ongoing agency financial support. The simplest tasks—enrolling a child in school, securing health insurance, or taking them to the doctor—become monumental hurdles without legal documentation or parent signatures. Through one-on-one navigation, legal clinics, and referral tools like the LAARK legal hotline, **Kinship Navigators** guide caregivers through the minor guardianship process. For grandmothers like Andrea and Bonnie, having a dedicated navigator meant finding the clarity, legal authority, and encouragement needed to secure stable homes for their grandchildren.

Behind these legal victories is an equally urgent need for basic household survival. Raising children on fixed or retirement incomes forces many caregivers to face immediate basic needs gaps. Through the **Kinship Caregiver Support Program**, families receive help with emergency utility bills, rent, or vouchers for food, clothing, and hygiene products. When a grandmother named Roberta had to leave her job to care for her two young

grandchildren in a rural area, **Kinship Navigators** stepped in to resolve past-due utilities and supply emergency diapers, clothing, and cleaning supplies.

Under the leadership of **Kinship Program Manager** Jasmine Marquez, **Kinship Lead** Laura Dow, and **Kinship Navigator** Mariela Valencia, the team offers in-person services in **Yakima** and **Richland** and will soon relocate its Yakima office to **303 E D Street**. Beyond individual navigation, local **Support Groups** and **Coffee Chats** offer caregivers a safe space to share resources and encouragement.

While state grants cover basic necessities, caregivers frequently face urgent costs—such as transportation—that grant funding cannot cover. You can make an immediate impact by donating gift cards to Safeway or Fred Meyer (for gasoline) or Walmart (for emergency household items). Drop off gift cards at our **Yakima** or **Tri-Cities** offices, or make a gift online at **catholiccharitiescw.org/donate**. To connect with a **Kinship Navigator** for phone, virtual, or in-person support, or to join a support group anywhere in our eight-county region, call **(509) 965-7100**.



Help us make a lasting impact.
Serving you and your neighbors for over 75 years.

Donate to support essential resources, from counseling and housing to childcare and senior services. Your gift provides hope to the most vulnerable in our community.

Volunteer across our services—how you help is entirely up to you! We match your unique skills and interests to ensure the best fit for both you and our clients.

Join the Catholic Charities team! Our most valuable resource is our people, and you might be the perfect match for one of our open positions.

Pray for our mission, our staff, and the individuals we serve every day.



SCAN HERE



We envision communities where people are treated with dignity and respect, their basic needs are met, and they are empowered to enhance the quality of their own lives.

Catholic Charities is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization funded in part by the State of Washington, federal contracts, and grants. Our mission is furthered by the contributions of generous foundations and individual donors.

We serve all in the community, regardless of faith.

Find hope at a
Catholic Charities office
near you.



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TLFi: Empowering Dads, Strengthening Families

Becoming a parent comes with incredible responsibility, yet fathers often face a lack of dedicated guidance and peer support. Research consistently shows that an active, loving father *significantly* boosts a child's early development, school performance, and emotional well-being. To ensure local dads have the tools they need to succeed, **Catholic Charities** partnered with **The Loving Father Initiative (TLFi)**, bringing targeted fatherhood programming to **Central Washington**.

Founded by local father Rich Hassett, **TLFi** offers classes, peer support groups, and practical resources that empower fathers—whether single, married, biological, or step-parents—to take an active role in their children's lives. Through dinner gatherings, skill-building sessions, and open discussions, dads gain a welcoming space to share parental concerns, learn effective parenting strategies, and build a strong community network with fellow fathers. Integrated directly with Catholic Charities' **Early Learning** programs, **TLFi** connects fathers to broader agency resources to foster long-term family stability and support their children's futures.

To join a gathering or learn more, contact our **Early Learning** team at **(509) 965-7100** or email drasmussen@catholiccharitiescw.org.