

# Honoring the Legacy of Darlene Darnell, CEO



## Announcing Manuel Villafán as CEO Beginning Spring of 2026



With 65,000 individuals served each year **across 22 counties**, we're looking back on the journey of how we got here.

When we consider Catholic Charities Serving Central Washington as we know it today, with 65,000 individuals served each year across 22 counties, it is important to consider the journey of how we got here. Leadership, of course, plays an integral role, as well as community needs. But most importantly, the mission of the agency has remained front and center:

## Motivated by Christ's love, we bring hope to life especially for those most in need.

### 1985

Darlene Darnell was a mother of a two-year-old daughter in 1985 when she first began working at Catholic Family & Child Service, now known as Catholic Charities. With a background in behavioral health counseling, she was excited to take on the role as a Mental Health Therapist and Clinical Director at the organization which was family focused and very mission driven.

For the next forty-one years, fulfilling that mission remained her heart's desire. "Catholic Family & Child Service always focused on people and meeting the needs in our Central Washington communities," Darlene adds.

As Darlene stepped into her new role, she experienced something to which many working mothers can relate: where to find quality care for her children.



After the birth of her second daughter, she remembers calling and visiting more than 20 licensed homes and centers, looking for a childcare where her infant and preschool daughters would be safe, with trained and certified care providers. She quickly realized she couldn't be the only mother struggling with this situation, and the planning for Carroll Children's Center began.

At the time, the growing agency was located in the Larson Building, but was making plans to move to the former Carroll High School campus next to Holy Family Catholic Church. Once the move was complete, Father Thomas Champoux, Executive Director, and Betty Hunziker, Agency Director, decided to open a childcare center for working parents. "It took more than a year," recalls Darlene, "and we literally had to build tables and bookshelves as there was not a budget for starting up."

Even with such limited resources, in 1989 Carroll Children's Center was opened, with an infant, a toddler and a preschool room. Thirty-five children were enrolled, including Darlene's youngest daughter, who was a preschooler. Darlene drew up policies and procedures so the program could be licensed through the state. "We were aiming for a place where children could grow and learn in a quality childcare environment," she says.

Carroll Children's Center hit the mark, and as enrollment grew and more classes were added, the program stressed the inclusion of children with special needs and children from low-income homes. Appropriate educational components were included in everyday activities and Catholic Family & Child Service was soon recognized as one of the very first agencies in Washington to provide emotional and behavioral supports in early learning classrooms.

Under Darlene's leadership, the counseling department also began implementing and developing new programs to better equip parents to manage challenging behaviors as they raised their children.

In 1991, the ATTACH program was developed by Catholic Family & Child Service staff and leadership, offering a classroom with mental health support for severely emotionally disturbed children and their families. In 1993, the agency partnered with the Yakama Nation to provide counseling services for Native American children and their families. The Valley Intervention Program was introduced in 1994, providing parents with hands-on skills to reinforce their child's positive behaviors. Together these programs have provided thousands of parents with more positive childrearing experiences, improved loving parent/child relationships, and an increase in children being ready for a successful transition to kindergarten.

In 1996, a reorganization of the growing agency resulted in the formation of a Board of Trustees. This included the establishment of a new Executive Director role (fulfilled by John Young) and the appointment of Darlene to Agency Director for Yakima. This new position included overseeing the entire scope of programming offered in Yakima County, including Counseling Services, Child Care Nutrition, Senior Services, Early Learning Classrooms, Child Care Resource & Referral, Seasonal Child Care, Adoption, and Foster Care. Darlene became intimately familiar with the operations of the programs, as well as the successes and struggles they faced.



CATHOLIC  
**FAMILY  
& CHILD**  
SERVICE  
Diocese of Yakima

### 1998

## To begin providing affordable housing in Central Washington communities, the Diocese of Yakima Housing Services was launched.

Although developed as a separate not-for-profit, the goal was to connect the services of Catholic Family & Child Service to serve the residents within Catholic Charities' multi-family housing units. In 2006 the program was renamed Catholic Charities Housing Services, and currently provides more than 5,000 families and individuals secure, safe, and affordable housing.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s an emerging need was identified; youth aging out of foster care unprepared for independence. Many of these youth and young adults were becoming homeless and unemployed, involved with the legal system, and unable to make the transition to adulthood. Darlene led the agency in identifying needs of these youth, and securing grants and funding to implement needed services, which included housing, independent living skill development, employment training, and support.



In 2003, Darlene became Director of Catholic Family & Child Service, and later Vice President throughout Central Washington, including offices in Yakima, Richland, Moses Lake, Wenatchee, and Grandview.

“The goal at this point was to expand our scope of service delivery to meet the needs of each community,” explains Darlene. “We wanted to look at services more holistically. We focused on identifying what changes were needed to replicate a successful program in a new area.”

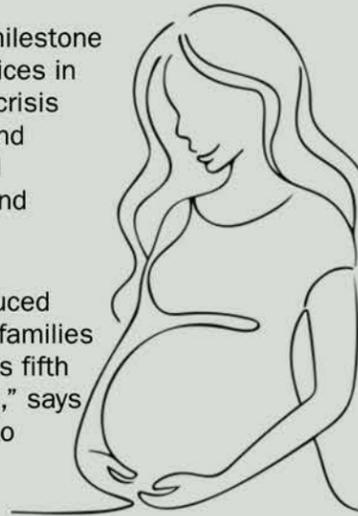
The agency continued to grow with the mission in the forefront and the goal of ‘always keeping clients at the center of who we are and what we do.’

Beginning in 2004 with the Kinship program supporting caregivers raising non-biological children, Catholic Family & Child Service steadily expanded its impact.

A federal grant in 2008 strengthened its Parents as Teachers home-visiting work, allowing staff to reach more families and deepen parent-child support services, and a 2013 partnership with Children’s Village launched one of the region’s first intensive Autism treatment programs for children two to five, using evidence-based early-intervention methods that help parents more effectively support their child’s ongoing learning and development.

In 2014 the agency reached another milestone by establishing Behavioral Health Services in Chelan and Douglas Counties, adding crisis intervention, mobile crisis response, and diversion programs that provide critical support for individuals facing mental and behavioral health challenges.

That same year, PREPARES was introduced statewide, providing new mothers and families support and companionship to a child’s fifth birthday. “With the onset of PREPARES,” says Darlene, “Catholic Charities was able to truly serve the entire life cycle, from pregnancy to senior life.”



## Darlene was appointed President and CEO of Catholic Charities Serving Central Washington in April of 2016.

“My previous positions within the agency really helped prepare me for this step,” recalls Darlene. “I had learned so much leading the wide scope of social and behavioral health services Catholic Charities provided, and the challenges that came with doing so. I am in awe of the collaboration and partnering that is required to bring to the community what it needs.”

In 2017 another goal was realized, Growing Hope Child & Family Development Center opened to meet the growing need for early learning classrooms, especially for low-income families and children with challenging behaviors.

“Looking to the future, I’m excited to see the growth continue. We are currently planning for the spring/summer opening of Casa de la Mora in Yakima under Catholic Charities Housing Services.

This building will offer 73 units of affordable housing to low-income families and individuals, with a focus on young adults transitioning from the foster care system, individuals with disabilities, and low-income families.

A project of this magnitude cannot be completed by a single agency. The state, city, community, and local health and social service agencies have joined forces to make this dream a reality. I’m proud to be a small part of it.”

## Then & Now

Darlene Darnell and Monsignor Thomas C. Champoux



1994



2024

## Some may liken leading an organization like Catholic Charities to a captain steering a huge ship, but Darlene says it’s nothing like that.

“It isn’t me. It’s the people: Board members, volunteers, Catholic Charities leadership and staff, and Bishop Tyson. I have been blessed to be surrounded by amazing people who remain passionate about being a resource and building services to help families and improve our community. Together with community partners, everyone works together to make Catholic Charities a place where people feel valued and can get their needs met. And I am thankful to have been a part of that.”

## A new CEO appointed: Manuel Villafán Jr. begins his new role in March of 2026.

With an eye on future succession, Bishop Tyson had encouraged Trustee Board Member Manuel Villafán Jr. to apply for the Director/Vice President position Darlene vacated in 2016 when she became CEO. That leadership role was reconfigured into Chief Operations Officer/Vice President, and quickly began providing Manuel with the experience and background he would need to one day become CEO.

Manuel found working closely with Darlene to be educational, insightful, and inspiring. “I quickly fell in with her leadership style, and admired how she kept herself humble in the role, focusing instead on the end results,” he says.



Manuel shared that his first paid job was actually working next to his father in the hop fields of the Yakima Valley at Loftus Ranches. He worked there from early childhood through his college years. "Working in the fields developed in me a strong work ethic, pride, and humility, but above all, gratitude to the owners, the Smith family. They believed in me and held an appreciation for the importance of an education."

Manuel also built an impressive professional history of social service and early childhood education. Before his employment with Catholic Charities, he served as Regional Director for Inspire Development Center (formerly known as the Washington State Migrant Counsel) Early Childhood Education Centers across Washington State. Prior to that, he was the Program Manager for EPIC Head Start program for nearly a decade.



One exciting area of growth is Brewing Hope, the coffee bar located inside the East Yakima facility. Brewing Hope is a local initiative between Catholic Charities' Youth and Young Adult Services and the Yakima chapter of Casey Family Programs. It is an on-site internship for young adults at various stages of phasing out of state care. Participants are provided with job training, customer service skills, and guidance about resume building and interviewing that they can take with them into the future.

This summer, a new mobile unit will expand Brewing Hope's operations to a greater number of community events and local businesses. This will add variety to the number of real-world scenarios that program participants will be prepared for and increase community awareness of the program. As demand for Brewing Hope's coffee offerings increases, Catholic Charities will be able to bring more youth into the program.

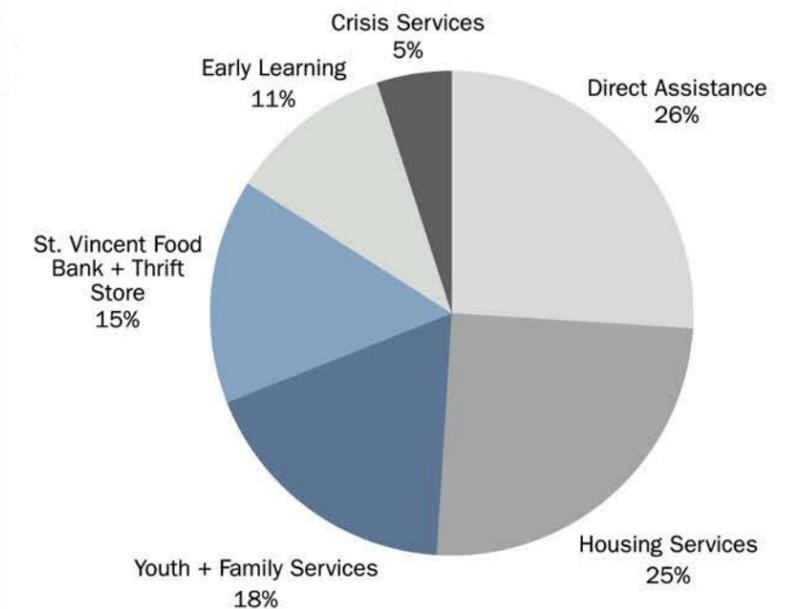
"We are really excited for this to happen," Manuel shares with a smile. "The mobile unit will appeal to wide audiences, including younger adults who may not yet be aware of what Catholic Charities is all about."

Manuel is excited to look at the future of Catholic Charities. "Our Senior Leadership retreat is coming up," he explains. "This is the first one with me in this new role. I am eager to share some ideas with the leadership team and get their input. I really want everyone to think about what we are already doing well, and to consider how we can strategically grow from there. It's an exciting time for everyone!"

The future of our agency, like the past, will face difficulties and challenges, as would any organization dedicated to serving vulnerable populations. But, thanks to Bishop Tyson's succession planning, we are confident that Manuel is primed to continue where Darlene left off: responding to emergent community needs, and finding the best ways to address them.

## Your Donations at Work

Catholic Charities brings hope to more than 65,000 individuals across Central Washington by providing social services.



"My strength and background was with comprehensive children's services and youth programs," he explains. "So, from the beginning, I have really dedicated myself to learning the behavioral health side of Catholic Charities."

One of Manuel's biggest accomplishments with the agency was the role he took with the Wenatchee office post-COVID. "Like at many businesses and organizations, COVID wreaked havoc with our employees. In the end, Wenatchee's Crisis Services (normally a contract for six Designated Crisis Responders) had just one full-time employee trying to carry the program. There were also staffing voids in many of our other programs in our North Central offices. I really felt called to step in and help," he explains.

Manuel agreed to spend two days each week in Wenatchee, helping the office get back on its feet. "The first priority was to get those empty positions filled with quality people," he says. "And then it was whatever was needed to be done, from providing daily leadership and guidance to supporting client needs directly."

Looking to the future, Manuel has big goals for Catholic Charities.

"We aren't just going to grow," he says. "We need to be strategic in our growth and direction. We will continue looking at what the community needs and considering how we can address those needs."

**Looking to the future, Manuel has big goals for Catholic Charities.**



# REPORT TO THE Community 2025

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.**

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## Stepping forward into a new chapter of our legacy: **We Invite You to Walk Alongside Us**

### **Reach out for support:**

*If you or someone you know could benefit from our services, we invite you to connect with us.*

### **Be a champion for others:**

*Discover a program that speaks to your heart and help amplify its impact in the community by volunteering.*

### **Invest in your neighbors:**

*Your gifts ensure our programs remain strong, responsible and accessible as we bring hope to life.*

### **Hold our mission and the people we serve in prayer and reflection.**

