

St. Margaret's Center

St. Margaret's Center, a program of Catholic Charities of Los Angeles Inc., has served low-income and homeless families since 1987. The Center provides a comprehensive range of emergency and supportive services to about 11,000 unduplicated individuals annually in the Los Angeles "L.A.X." area, primarily those living in the cities or streets of Lennox and surrounding communities.

St. Margaret's Center's mission has remained the same throughout its history, but the Center's programs have grown and evolved to respond to the needs of the community. St. Margaret's Center's programs target individuals and families who live at or below the poverty level, and are administered by a paid staff of ten, and an average of 75 volunteers per month. Programs are offered in both English and Spanish, and are free of charge, with the exception of nominal fees for immigration and counseling services. Two target groups have developed over the years as the Center's staff has become aware of their unmet needs: Spanish-speaking families, and homeless individuals. The Center provides assistance, though, to anyone in need, regardless of the person's race, national origin or religious affiliation.

St. Margaret's Center's goal is to provide relief, dignity and support to low-income persons in crisis and to assist individuals through case management and skills development to become more self-sufficient and to achieve economic security. St. Margaret's Center's services include:

- **Emergency Food:** Free monthly groceries for low-income families (@250/week), M,W & F, and sack lunches for homeless persons (@400/week) every M,W & F. Senior food program also available the 3rd Tuesday of every month.
- **Information and Referral:** Information and referrals for free or low-cost services and programs, e.g., legal, medical, housing, employment, government programs. Advocacy with government assistance programs.
- **Translation:** Assistance in filling out simple forms, mail, telephone calls, etc.
- **Coordinated Entry System (CES):** Program to assess and support chronically homeless persons with disabling conditions, and to assist them secure permanent housing.
- **Emergency Shelter Voucher:** When available, short-term emergency housing for eligible homeless families and individuals with special needs.
- **Homeless and Household Supplies:** Hygiene kits, blankets, and other supplies, as available, to homeless persons. Diapers and household items, as available, to families.
- **Counseling Services:** Low-cost counseling for individuals, couples, children and families provided by licensed therapists and supervised interns.
- **CalFresh (Food Stamp) Application Assistance:** Free assistance with filling out the food stamp application and follow-up case tracking and troubleshooting. D.P.S.S. worker on site for this program on Wednesdays.
- **Health Insurance Application Assistance:** Information and free assistance in applying for low-cost and free health insurance programs. Certified Enrollment Counselor (CEC) processes MediCal, Covered California, and other programs.
- **Vision Screening:** Free eye exams provided quarterly by the U.C.L.A./Jules Stein Mobile Eye Clinic. Applications for assistance from the Optometric Center of Los Angeles.
- **Mammograms:** Free mammograms for low-income, uninsured women over 40 who qualify. First Thursday each month, provided by Mobile Mammography Screening, Inc.

- **Utility Assistance:** Payment up to \$100 each for Gas and Edison bills, when program activated. PACE staff on site monthly to process LIHEAP applications.
- **Mailing Address:** For homeless persons, use of the Center for their mailing address, and the Center's telephone and FAX machines for important calls/business (e.g., for employment, medical and legal needs).
- **Immigration Processing:** Low-cost immigration processing (petitions for relatives, citizenship, renewal of green cards, DACA, adjustment of status, etc.) every day by appointment.
- **ESL Classes:** Small intensive classes, Monday through Thursday, designed to provide beginning and intermediate levels English language fluency.
- **Citizenship Classes:** Classes Monday and Wednesday afternoons for those who are preparing for their citizenship interview.
- **G.E.D. Classes:** Small daily classes for those working on their high school equivalency exam.
- **Nutrition Education:** One-on-one and group educational sessions encouraging good nutrition, healthy habits, physical activity and disease prevention. Free yoga class offered on-site. Policy, systems and environmental programs also.
- **Literacy Tutoring:** One-on-one tutoring for basic English language, math and computer literacy provided by volunteers for both adults and youth.
- **Free Cell Phones:** For those who qualify by income. Wednesdays and Fridays.
- **Job Referrals:** Employment readiness and job and training program referrals.
- **Transportation Assistance:** Bus tokens and tax vouchers for eligible participants.
- **Educational Workshops:** Community workshops are held periodically with topics of interest for low-income families, e.g., health, housing, employment, money management, public benefits, etc.
- **Christmas Program:** Day-long party with new toys for children, food for 450 families.

A community center such as St. Margaret's offers a natural avenue to provide a range of services to poverty-level families. Over the past 30 years persons with multiple needs have come to the Center for services and referrals for food, shelter, legal, medical, employment, housing, education and social services. Currently, about 800 persons come into St. Margaret's Center each week for one or more of its programs. They are all low-income, with the majority living below the federal poverty level.

St. Margaret's Center
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