

Catholic Charities' goal: 1,900 kids

Federal funding spurs project to expand Family Care access

NEWARK—During the year-long debate on national health-care reform legislation, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark was working quietly to bring affordable healthcare to families in need, especially children in Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Union counties.

Late last year Catholic Charities was selected to join a nationwide coalition to increase the number of children enrolled in healthcare (see *The Catholic Advocate*, Nov. 25, 2009). As part of Catholic Charities' participation, the agency received \$148,000 in federal funding—the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act—to increase enrollment in New Jersey's Family Care, the state's health-care insurance program.

"Our region of New Jersey, especially within the counties we serve, has the highest percentage

of eligible children lacking health insurance," Dr. Phillip Frese, chief executive officer of Catholic Charities, explained. "Our area also has one of the highest costs of living in the country yet one of the lowest participation rates in NJ Family Care, particularly among our immigrant community. This all has a severe impact on those most in need."

Catholic Charities is aiming at a targeted enrollment of 240 children in each of the four counties it serves, ultimately connecting over 1,900 children to appropriate healthcare services over the next two years.

Frese pointed to a variety of reasons for the current low-enrollment rates in the NJ Family Care program. These include a misconception of the program's eligibility requirements, language barriers, a fear of legal ramifications among the immigrant community,

the complex application system, and even simply a lack of awareness. Responding to these misconceptions, the new federal funding initiative has enabled Catholic Charities to mount an aggressive two-year, grass-roots outreach campaign.

From the outset, it was clear the agency would undertake a community-based approach for the campaign, according to Frese. "Our plan is to provide easily understandable program information, eligibility education and application assistance to these families. By informing residents, conducting both on-site screening assessments, and assisting eligible families with the application process, we are confident we will be able to improve program participation rates."

The first step of the campaign was to have staff members of all existing outreach programs within



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Catholic Charities launched an outreach campaign in March to educate eligible families about how to enroll in the NJ Family Care program. The effort focuses on the healthcare needs of children. For more information, visit the agency's Web site (www.ccannj.com) or call (973) 639-6523.

Catholic Charities and its affiliates receive training on the NJ Family Care program. A targeted communications program also was put in place. Bilingual agency representatives, armed with laptop computers and portable printers, cur-

rently are making presentations and conducting on-site screenings. Frese said pre-screening will be critical to the success of the project. "Too often, people submit an application only to find they do not have the required paperwork."