

**DECEMBER  
2011**

# Catholic Social Services

Thank you for supporting the following programs:

Brother Francis Shelter

Charlie Elder House

Clare House

Homeless Family Services

McAuley Manor

Pregnancy Support & Adoption Services

Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services

Special Needs Services

St. Francis House

To make an end-of-the-year donation or to purchase an honorary gift please visit [cssalaska.org](http://cssalaska.org) or contact Tricia Teasley at 222-7355.

**Thank you!**

## Young Family Struggles with Poverty & Iraqi Deployment Injuries

What happens when neither Plan A nor Plan B work out? You move to Plan C. For too many families, Plan C means using the emergency shelter system in Anchorage. Mike & Brandi were on Plan C this fall. They stayed at the McKinnell House Family Shelter, where they were referred to CSS for additional help from our Homeless Family Services program.

Mike is a young Iraq war veteran with significant health issues; Brandi is a former Alaska National Guard member. Because of their military service they are eligible to receive assistance from CSS' Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). CSS recently received and is managing this innovative grant that allows us to serve veterans' families, not just veterans. The SSVF grant provides services in Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley, supplying the missing piece in the current umbrella of VA services by addressing the needs of homeless veterans and their families.

How does Alaska stack up nationally for veterans-in-need? Alaska has the highest percentage of veterans per capita in the United States, according to the Anchorage Regional VA office, and is one of the few States with a growing veteran population, currently estimated at 74,564. Unfortunately, for some veterans, the transition to civilian life is difficult. This includes both individual veterans and those with families. According to 2010 data, there were 450 individual veterans and 179 members of veteran families homeless in Anchorage and the Mat-Su. This likely underestimates the number of homeless veterans' families, because many families are "doubled up" with



friends and relatives. The Alaska VA also estimates another 285 very-low income veteran families living in public housing or using a housing choice voucher and then another 313 veteran families on wait-lists for these housing alternatives.

Mike from Indiana & Brandi from Georgia met and married in Alaska. All was well prior to Mike's 14-month deployment to Iraq. "The deployment really transformed my body and mind. I was a gunner (the person who stands in the armored vehicle operating the stationary gun) with a 210 pound IBA (Interceptor Body Armor) vest on. I suffered 4 serious concussions from IED (Improvised Explosive Device) vibrations that caused my brain to swell and bruise. I have a long list of physical and mental injuries, including a herniated disc and several compressed discs in my back and really feel like I am barely hanging on," Mike explains.

Brandi shares Mike's opinion about his deployment, "My husband didn't come back from Iraq, he really didn't."

Brandi & Mike are currently living in a mid-town apartment with their two daughters.

*Continues on page 3*



3710 East 20th Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99508  
phone (907) 222-7300  
catholicsocialservices@cssalaska.org  
cssalaska.org

Non-profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit # 472  
Anchorage, AK



Visit us on-line  
[cssalaska.org](http://cssalaska.org)

### Board of Trustees

Monica Anderson, Providence Health and Services Alaska

Billie R. Bowen, ConocoPhillips

Suwannee Rose Carroll, Fed Ex

Maurice Coyle, Retired Physician

Michelle Egan, Alyeska Pipeline

Erniestine Fleece, Federal Aviation Administration

Michael Fredericks, Rim First People

Patrick Gilmore, Atkinson, Conway & Gagnon

William Granger, Wells Fargo

Kara Moriarty, Alaska Oil & Gas Association

Lottie Michael, Bond, Stephens & Johnson Real Estate Services

Patricia Petrivelli, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Maria Tagliavento, CIHA

Walter Williams, KPMG

Ex-Officio — Fr. Scott Medlock, Rabbi Michael Oblath and Carol Comeau

## Calendar of Events

**Christmas carols and Christmas Eve Mass**, celebrated by Archbishop Schwietz, 5:30 p.m., Friday, December 24th at Brother Francis Shelter, 1021 East 3rd Avenue.

**PFD Check Off** coming soon January 1, 2012 - March 31, 2012. Please remember CSS when you are filling out your PFD application. You are able to designate CSS as a beneficiary of all or a portion of your PFD! To find out more visit [www.pickclickgive.org](http://www.pickclickgive.org).

**Martin Luther King Youth Day of Education & Advocacy**, Monday, January 16th from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. (drop-in hours) at the CSS Center, 3710 East 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**Charity Ball 2012 "All that Jazz"** will be held Saturday, May 12, 2012, at the Hotel Captain Cook. The Charity Ball is Catholic Social Services largest annual fundraiser and helps to fund our nine social service programs. Please contact Tricia Teasley at 222-7355 or [charityball@cssalaska.org](mailto:charityball@cssalaska.org) for more information.



**This Holiday Season....Fight poverty.  
Support families. Restore dignity.**

To make an donation or to purchase and honorary gift please visit [cssalaska.org](http://cssalaska.org) and click on donate, or contact Tricia Teasley at 222-7355 or [tteasley@cssalaska.org](mailto:tteasley@cssalaska.org).

*Mike & Brandi continued from page 1*

They are both working jobs that pay a little more than the Alaska minimum wage of \$7.75 per hour. McKinell Shelter and CSS staff assisted them with securing an apartment by providing the security deposit and 1st month's rent.

After Mike's deployment he was transferred to Ft. Bragg in North Carolina. Mike decided to leave the military and the family moved to Georgia to be near Brandi's family. Mike & Brandi believed that Alaska provided better opportunities and quality of life for their children and decided to return to where they met and married. Friends offered housing for them until they got on their feet. With this, Brandi returned first and secured employment; Mike and the children followed. It's a typical story — getting on their feet took longer than either they or their friends expected, and with a family of four, their friends' good will was tapped, and Mike and Brandi needed to find an alternative. Brandi & Mike ended up at the family shelter in September.

Poverty, child-care, transportation, and caring for an ailing loved-one are all issues that cause people tremendous stress. Brandi is dealing with all of these issues at the same time. "If I fall, we all fall," is how Brandi describes the stress she feels.

Despite all the hardships, Brandi & Mike are grateful to be together and surviving. They have concrete goals for the future. Mike, when his health stabilizes, will take advantage of the GI bill and go back to school, while Brandi will pursue opportunities in the field of social work.

Mike and Brandi are one of a dozen families that are benefitting from the SSVF program through CSS. CSS is grateful to have the opportunity to implement this important program for veterans and provide hope during these difficult times.

As you know, CSS has a long history of working with veterans throughout our multiple programs. At Brother Francis Shelter (BFS), 19% of our clients are veterans. We anticipate seeing more young veterans in the months and years ahead from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The steadfast support of our donors has made it possible to provide basic help to Veterans throughout our history. CSS was able to leverage that support and secure the SSVF grant that will help military families in a more significant way. With your help, CSS is living out John F. Kennedy's words: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

*Bomalaski continued from page 2*

Children's Services to facilitate the home study process for Special Needs Adoptions in South Central Alaska. Last year, 204 families received CSS home studies for 354 children in foster care in need of safe, permanent and loving homes.

Catholic Social Services believes in the dignity and human potential in every person and especially in our families and communities; the family is the basic unit of society and by lifting up our children, especially through our foster care and adoption systems, we lift up our community. As you enter into your preparations for this Holiday Season, please take a moment to think about how your support of CSS helps children in our community find a forever home.

### **A New Event at CSS for Youth in 2012!**

Join us for **Martin Luther King Youth Day of Education & Advocacy** on Monday, January 16, 2012 from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. (drop-in hours) at the CSS Center, 3710 East 20th Avenue. This event will illustrate how Martin Luther King's dream lives on today and focuses on youth interested in learning about how CSS serves people in need of food, shelter, support & advocacy. Visit [cssalaska.org](http://cssalaska.org) to find our more.



*This is the season of hope, peace and light. Your support of Catholic Social Services throughout the year has been a light of hope in the lives of our clients. Thank you for making the days brighter for your neighbors struggling with overcoming poverty. With your help, CSS was able to provide critically needed services to 20,317 people last year.*

*With Gratitude,  
Susan Bomalaski  
CSS Executive Director*

## Innovative Approach for Finding Children in Foster Care Forever Homes



Susan Bomalaski, Ph.D., LPC  
CSS Executive Director



**A Great Way to Ring in the New Year — Pick. Click. Give. starts 01/01/12**

When you apply on-line for your Permanent Fund Dividend you have an opportunity to give all or a portion of your PFD to Catholic Social Services.

Find out more at [pickclickgive.org](http://pickclickgive.org).

**Pick.  
Click.  
Give.**

**Thank you!**

The Holiday Season makes us think of children. We have the Christmas story of Christ's birth, our childhood memories of the Holidays we experienced and the joy of planning the perfect Holiday for the children in our lives.

As you know, strengthening families is a key part of our mission at Catholic Social Services (CSS) and many of our programs focus on the well-being of children. I am delighted to tell you about an innovative approach to Special Needs Adoptions (children in the foster care system eligible for adoption). The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption funded a part-time Adoption Recruiter position for CSS through their Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) program. WWK has a 5-year track record across the United States of finding forever homes for children and youth that linger in the foster care system. How? Through diligent inquiry, and a small case load, the Adoption Recruiters connect youth in foster care with relationships they may have lost in the past, starting with the familiar circles of the youth's family and friends. We are currently working with youth in the Anchorage and Mat-Su Valley.

"They want me to be part of their family. They mean it when they say they care and they show it," explains a 12-year-old boy to the CSS Wendy's Wonderful Kids' (WWK) Adoption Recruiter, Erica, at his adoption hearing. After having lived in 11 foster homes

in the past 3 years, with Erica's help, this child has finally found a loving family.

The Adoption Recruiter meets with youth at least monthly, developing a close relationship to best help assess their needs and desires. Our Adoption Recruiter develops a plan for recruiting a forever home that is specific to each youth's unique needs and history. When necessary, our Adoption Recruiter identifies a permanent adoptive home outside a youth's network. We work aggressively to find a forever home for our youth. After a proposed match is accepted, we work closely with the adoptive family to assure they are prepared to provide a loving, stable and permanent home. As needed, the Adoption Recruiter acts as a change agent, identifying and addressing systemic barriers in the foster care system and advocating on behalf of the youth and families they serve.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids has 122 recruiters nationwide. The program has helped more than 2,500 children find their forever homes. The effectiveness of the WWK model was put to the test with an unprecedented, rigorous five-year study. Its findings are significant and substantial and truly benefit those waiting to be adopted. Not only are children who are served by WWK Adoption Recruiters 1.7 times more likely to be adopted than those not served by the program, but children

referred at age 15 or older and children with mental health disorders are also 3 times more likely to be adopted.

Our CSS recruiter, Erica Johnson explains, "I have worked to support kids and families in our Alaskan communities since 1993, and I can tell you, this approach is so much better for the kids. I really get to hear these youth's stories and they are as diverse as our great state! These children are just like your kids & mine – they are in gifted programs, participate in sports and enjoy playing in the snow. Most lose their 'labels' once they settle into their forever homes."

A career social worker, Erica delighted in sharing with me the countless stories that reflect the uniqueness and resilience of each youth she serves. For example, she recently found out a 12-year-old boy she is working with taught himself to play bass guitar. When she asked him how he did that he said, "I can do stuff like that...people just don't realize it."

Last year, about 1,800 Alaskan children were in foster care. Sadly, many moved to adulthood without a forever family. On any given day, about 50 youth in the Anchorage/Matsu area are in need of a permanent family. In addition to WWK, Catholic Social Services partners with Alaska's Office of *continues on page 3*