

# CATHOLIC CHARITIES JACKSONVILLE

# CHRONICLES

SPRING 2025



Sofia, Camp I Am Special camper



Camp I Am Special provides camp experiences to children, teens, and adults with Intellectual and Developmental Differences. We empowered 176 campers last year.

## Camp I Am Special Impacts Campers, Families and Buddies Alike

Natalie Lupoli, mother of three, first heard about Camp I Am Special through her local mom's group, St. Anne's Circle. Her daughter, Sofia, was nonverbal, diagnosed with severe autism and had Intellectual and Developmental Differences that made overnight camp a concern. After receiving reassurance from a trusted friend on staff, Natalie took six-year-old Sofia to Camp I Am Special's summer session in 2014 – and they've both loved it ever since. One of Natalie's favorite things about camp is the perfect balance of safety and freedom it allows Sofia.

"The buddies and camp leaders follow her wherever she goes, letting her lead the way," Natalie said.

Yet it wasn't just Sofia that benefited; for the first time, Natalie and her husband received a full week of respite. This allowed them to enjoy quality time with Sofia's siblings, Michael and Gemma, at places less feasible for Sofia, such as Marineland and Ichetucknee Springs.

"I've spent Sofia's whole life on-call, but when she's at camp, I never have to worry," Natalie said.

Sofia's joy and the gift of respite led the entire family to give back. Natalie started bringing Michael and Gemma along to help with camp meals, lawncare, and decorating. As the two grew older, they became volunteers – called buddies – for other campers, forging strong connections with their peers while gaining perspective that every family has its own unique gifts and challenges. It's been 10 years since the Lupoli family first drove Sofia to camp, and now she gets visibly excited as they begin the route there. It's a feeling the whole family shares.

**If you'd like to help more families have access to camp, please consider becoming a Camp I Am Special sponsor or making a donation by contacting Isaiah Maass at 904.230.7447 or [CampIAmSpecial@CCBJax.org](mailto:CampIAmSpecial@CCBJax.org).**

# Community Partnerships Boost Our Impact



Thanks to the generosity of Ascension St. Vincent's Foundation's (ASVF) Mobile Health Outreach Ministry, the people attending a recent Catholic Charities food distribution not only received healthy food, but also a health screening.

ASVF set up a screening area at check-in to provide free exams, disease management education, and guidance for accessing future mobile health services.

"As they try to make ends meet, many of our clients must choose between food and medical care," said Regional Director for Catholic Charities Jacksonville Eileen Sueter. "To be able to provide access to both in one day was a true blessing."

With the support of the ASVF team, one uninsured client was referred for care at a nearby clinic, while several others with hypertension and high blood sugar were directed to schedule appointments with their primary care doctors.

After the ASVF team finished the screenings, some stayed to help pack and distribute food.

"We can't say how grateful we are for our continued partnership with Ascension St. Vincent's Foundation, Sueter said. "Together we can help people who have fallen on hard times stay healthy and get back on their feet."

## Other Ways We Help



Our Food Assistance program provides essential nourishment through our community food pantry. Last year, **we distributed 583,119 pounds of food** to local hungry individuals.



Our Emergency Financial Assistance program prevents homelessness by covering the cost of rent, mortgage, utilities, and food. Last year, **we provided 2,329 individuals with crucial financial support.**

## Letter from the Regional Director

Dear Friends,

As we step into a new year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the impact we've made together and the challenges that lie ahead. Every day, we see firsthand the struggles of families, seniors, and individuals facing food insecurity and financial hardship. Yet, thanks to your generosity and support, Catholic Charities continues to be a source of hope for so many in our community.

This past year has not been without its challenges. The rising cost of food, housing, and utilities has placed even greater strain on the people we serve, and we have had to make difficult decisions to continue providing essential support where it is needed most. Even in the face of these challenges, our commitment remains steadfast—to help families stay in their homes, ensure seniors have access to nutritious meals, and offer relief to those in crisis.

Looking ahead, we are focused on strengthening our emergency assistance programs and finding sustainable ways to continue serving our community with dignity and compassion. Your support remains essential. Whether through volunteering, donations, or simply spreading the word about our mission, every effort makes a difference.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we will continue to be a beacon of hope for those in need.

With gratitude,



**Eileen Sueter**  
Regional Director  
Catholic Charities  
Jacksonville

