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**CATHOLIC CHARITIES TO TRANSFORM REFUGEE PROGRAM
ENHANCED MENTAL HEALTH, SAFETY NET AND STABILITY SERVICES COMING IN 2017**

(Pittsburgh) – Over the coming 12 months, Catholic Charities will redesign its refugee program to focus on pre-employment training, basic life skills and assistance overcoming the scars of past trauma.

"There's a reason refugees are refugees," says Executive Director Susan Rauscher. "They have *all* experienced trauma. The fact that the process of resettlement requires them to adjust very quickly to a new life in an unfamiliar environment often adds a layer of distress."

Until now Catholic Charities' contract has limited it to providing three months of basic resettlement assistance for newly-arrived refugees, including shelter, food, and help finding jobs. Three other regional agencies – Acculturation for Justice Access and Peace Outreach, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Pittsburgh, and the Northern Area Multi-Service Center – currently provide more than 85% of all local resettlement services.

Those agencies' excellent work will allow Catholic Charities to focus on helping refugee families become self-sufficient. The new services, which are currently difficult for those who don't speak English to access, include counseling for traumatic stress and coaching on parenting, budgeting, and working the U.S..

Catholic Charities' Board of Directors approved the changes in June. According to Rauscher, "we realized that *we* need to provide the solution" to the current limitations on ongoing enhanced refugee support. "Experience has shown that enhanced support services will strengthen not only refugees, but also the communities in which they live."

Catholic Charities has a well-developed counseling program and provides safety net and stability services in all six counties of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. "We are in a perfect position to adapt these programs to the needs of new refugees, who most often speak a different language, understand a different culture, and have endured great tragedy and hardship," notes Rauscher.

Catholic Charities received the last of its resettlement clients at the end of June. The resettlement phase of the program will officially conclude on September 30. The new program is expected to launch by July 1, 2017.

"We will need to spend the next six months working closely with experts to design a service model that best responds to refugees' needs," Rauscher says. In the meantime, Catholic Charities will share resources and referrals with existing resettlement programs.

"Catholic Charities has been privileged to resettle newly arriving refugees for more than 30 years and we are excited to be able to expand outreach to refugees in our area by developing these new and important dimensions to our refugee services," Rauscher says.

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