

### From Warmth to Worth: What the Knights of Columbus Make Possible at Vista Maria

For 142 years, Vista Maria has been a steady presence for young people and families who needed someone in their corner. Founded in 1883 by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, we began as a single home for girls in Detroit and have grown into a mission-driven organization serving youth and families across southeast Michigan. While our programs have evolved, our focus remains the same: to walk with each young person in faith, care, and a steadfast belief in their individual worth. Today, we help youth facing cycles of trauma and instability by not only providing services, but a place where they are encouraged and empowered to move forward.

Our story began with five Sisters of the Good Shepherd who came to Detroit to care for young girls and women society had cast aside. They opened the House of the Good Shepherd, offering shelter, education, and guidance to those in need. As the need for care grew, the Sisters expanded their work to a new campus in Dearborn Heights, which was gifted by Henry and Clara Ford. In 1942, the organization was renamed Vista Maria.

That same spirit of fearless compassion still drives us today, as our services have grown to meet the ever-evolving needs of youth in Michigan. Vista Maria cannot accomplish our mission alone. We depend on committed supporters like you. The Knights of Columbus play an essential role in sustaining and expanding our impact. Since 2021, your generous support through the Coats for Kids program has kept hundreds of youth warm—both on our campus and in foster care throughout the community. These coats do more than provide comfort; they send a powerful message that every child is seen, valued, and cared for.

We support young people who have experienced severe trauma, abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Many arrive at our doors having cycled through numerous placements, institutional care, or unsafe environments. For some, it's the first place they feel safe, supported, and unconditionally valued.

Vista Maria offers a full range of care designed to meet youth where they are and help them move forward with dignity and purpose:

- **Foster care and adoption** programs that prioritize stability and lifelong connections. We support both foster families and birth families, with a focus on reunification when possible and permanency when necessary.
- **Recovery programs for adolescent survivors of human trafficking**, including specialized residential care. Vista Maria operates one of the few facilities in Michigan offering comprehensive treatment and stabilization services for youth who have experienced exploitation.
- **Transitional and independent living** programs that support youth aging out of foster care and prepare them for adulthood. These include supervised group living, apartment-based programs, and support from caring adults to help navigate life skills like education, employment, healthcare, and budgeting.
- **Residential mental health treatment** for youth with complex emotional and behavioral needs. This includes individualized treatment plans, clinical therapy, and support for education and wellness—all within a safe, structured, and trauma-informed environment.
- **Juvenile justice case management** and community-based services through our newest program, InSight Youth and Family Connections. InSight supports court-involved youth and their families through home-based therapy, wraparound care, and restorative practices focused on reducing recidivism and increasing community connection.

In April 2025, Vista Maria merged with InSight Youth and Family Connections, a respected provider of juvenile justice and community-based services across southeast Michigan. InSight now operates as a program of Vista Maria, continuing

its mission to support youth and families involved with the justice system. The merger allows us to expand our impact, offer more prevention and intervention services, and create a more integrated continuum of care for youth across the region.

We often serve young people during the most difficult moments of their lives. Some have faced unimaginable abuse, have been trafficked or abandoned, or have never had a consistent adult believe in them. Vista Maria is often the first place where they feel secure, supported, and unconditionally valued.



Our approach is both deeply spiritual and intensely practical. We offer therapy, education, housing, life skills, and more. But perhaps most importantly, we provide compassion and a path forward. This work is essential. It helps youth break generational cycles and build lives grounded in purpose and possibility.

Healing from trauma requires extraordinary patience and commitment. Meredith Reese, our Chief Operations Officer and Interim Agency Lead, explains, "Healing is hard. It can be messy, painful, and incredibly difficult. But at Vista Maria, we witness daily the transformative power that unfolds when caring adults consistently show up with empathy, patience, and understanding."



Each year, hundreds of young people find hope and possibility at Vista Maria. Jaedyn, a current resident in our Shepherd Hall Independent Living Program, shared, "Some advice that I would give future residents that come to Vista Maria is: this isn't a permanent place. It's a place to help you. It's not a punishment. You didn't do anything wrong. You had wrong things happen to you, and that's why you're here. The staff aren't here to tell you what to do. They're here to help you figure out who you want to be."

These words reflect a truth we see every day: when youth are surrounded by care and support, they begin to believe in themselves again. They realize their future can be shaped by hope, not defined by what they've endured.



Dynisti, another young person in our care, came to Vista Maria after years of struggling with her mental health and bouncing between hospital stays. She shared, "I was having mental breakdowns at school, [and] around my mom and family. My mom didn't know what to do, so I kept getting sent to the hospital." After a few months in our residential program, Dynisti transitioned into Independent Living Plus. Now, she's focused on finishing high school and going to college for nursing. Dynisti also volunteers as an assistant volleyball coach for younger girls on Vista Maria's campus. "I feel supported by Vista a hundred percent," she said. "Now my siblings look at me and say, 'Wow. I want to be like her.'"

Stories like Jaedyn's and Dynisti's show why Vista Maria exists. They prove that healing is possible and that, with steady encouragement from a community of people who care about them, youth can rise above their trauma and become leaders for others.

Sr. Janice Rushman, RGS, who works closely with the youth and lives on our campus, reminds us: "Our loving Creator does not always extend the divine hand directly to us, but so often gives us help and strength through friends and supporters, who stand with us in this Holy Work."

That support makes a lasting difference. Your involvement—through advocacy, volunteering, or giving—helps youth reclaim their dignity and build lives filled with purpose. We invite the Knights of Columbus to continue walking beside us. When others step back, you step in. And no child should face their future alone. We deeply value our Catholic roots, the resilience of the youth we serve, and the partnership of committed supporters like you.

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### How You Can Help

#### Donate

Support us with a monthly gift, shop our wish lists, or include Vista Maria in your planned giving: [www.vistamaria.org/donate](http://www.vistamaria.org/donate)

#### Volunteer

Mentor a youth, adopt a Holiday Wish List, or volunteer your time:  
Contact Jessica Marcetti at [jmarcetti@vistamaria.org](mailto:jmarcetti@vistamaria.org)

#### Advocate

Invite us to share our story at your parish, school, or council event:  
Follow @VistaMariaOrg on social media or visit [www.vistamaria.org](http://www.vistamaria.org)



### The Right Place at the Right Time

God uses people, especially Knights, to help others in unexpected ways. A brother Knight (we'll call him Don) and a friend went fishing in the Detroit River recently. On the way back to the launch they came upon a boat that looked like no one was in it. As they got closer they saw there was a dog in the boat. Then as they got even closer they saw a man crumpled down in the boat.

They got close enough to hook the boat and the friend jumped into the other boat and discovered that the man (we'll call him Ed) was having a stroke. The friend drove the other boat to the launch and Don followed him in his boat. They got out and several people were just standing around. Don went to Ed's boat to help him out. Ed wanted to call his wife and Don helped him find his phone in the boat. Ed was able to talk well enough for Don to understand him. Ed called his wife then Don talked with her and she was understandably hysterical about what happened.

Don got Ed's car keys out of his pocket and EMS took him to the nearby hospital. Don and his friend pulled Ed's boat out of the water and took care of his dog. They called Ed's brother and waited until he came.

Don said that it was a last minute decision to fish in the Detroit River that day. They had been fishing closer to home recently but decided to try a different location on that day. It turned out to be a life-saving decision by brother Knight Don and his friend for someone named Ed who they just happened to meet that day.

### Council 14729 - Chili Cook-Off



**St. Augustine of Hippo Council 14729 from Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Edwardsburg**, hosted a Chili Cook-Off Fundraiser to benefit the Edwardsburg Food Pantry (EFP). The event featured 10 local chefs with a variety of homemade chili's. With community backing, the event raised over \$2,600.00 to support local families in need. In addition to chili tastings, guests enjoyed

raffles, baked goods, and family fun. Judged by a popular vote, the winner of the cook-off was Brother Knight, George Pabreza, who has had 85 years of experience in the kitchen.

In the picture on the left is check presentation: Amy Hefler-Mgr EFP, Brother Knight Bill Eustis and Pastor Scott Sheel-Dir EFP. Pictured on the right is Brother George Pabreza.



### K of C Au Lac Council Youth of the Month - May 2025



Congratulations to Melanie Bilicki on being named as the Au Lac Council 10724 Youth of the Month for May 2025! Melanie is the daughter of Mike and Kandie Bilicki and a freshman student at Cardinal Mooney High School in Marine City. She is a very active member of our I.C. Parish Youth Group and has participated in many parish activities, such as the summer festival and Lenten fish fries.

At Cardinal Mooney High School Melanie received the Citizenship Award and has been on the Honor Roll. She also received a Varsity letter for girls basketball as a freshman. While at Immaculate Conception

School she received the President's Silver Education Award, Personal Success Award for Perseverance and Patience, Art Award and Academic Olympics Awards.

We thank Melanie for sharing her faith with others and for her service to our parish!

Pictured L-R: Patrick Bohr (Au Lac Council 10724 Grand Knight); Melanie Bilicki; Fr. Joseph Esper (Pastor - Immaculate Conception Parish)



**Failure is not fatal. Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. It should challenge us to new heights of accomplishments, not pull us to new depths of despair. From honest failure can come valuable experience.**

**Programs = New Members**