



# SPOTLIGHT

Patrice Munford meets Baltimore families at their most challenging moments. As a therapist with Catholic Charities' Baltimore Child and Adolescent Response System (B-CARS) program, she works every day with children and families to help them deal with crisis situations. With Baltimore experiencing prolonged spikes in both violence and opioid-related overdose deaths, the many children in the city face enormous chaos and stress.

# SUPPORT

## HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CRISIS

*“We have a lot of children who don’t know how to cope with the violence in their lives,” says Munford.* “They may not know how to verbalize their feelings. They’ve had multiple deaths in their family due to homicide or overdose, and they don’t know how to cope.”

With financial and other support from BHSB, B-CARS provides hands-on services to children and adolescents who are in crisis and their families. The goal is to stabilize the young person and create a plan to help the family over the long term.

At B-CARS, a licensed clinician assesses the young people for mental health and other health issues, and B-CARS’ staff provides ongoing counseling. That often means visiting the home to meet with family members — a better location to have a more honest conversation about the crisis — or going to the school to hear from teachers and counselors. B-CARS therapists make recommendations for ongoing services, including mental health treatment, substance use disorder treatment, and grief counseling. And B-CARS connects families with organizations that provide case management services to help the families stay on track with counseling and other supports.

In one recent case, a teenage girl who had once been very physically active and loved sports was referred to B-CARS by her guardian

after the girl grew increasingly depressed and stopped attending school. She was living with her guardian at the time as her parents were reportedly unable to care for her. Munford and a behavioral health specialist met with the teenager and found that the girl’s behavioral health symptoms stemmed from underlying dynamics related to her relationship with her mother.

The B-CARS team engaged the girl, as well as her mother, in intensive but supported therapeutic and behavioral interventions to address the identified underlying needs driving her behaviors. Through these interventions, and the supportive and safe environment nurtured by B-CARS, the young girl and her mother were able to demonstrate immense growth in their communication, positively impacting their relationship and reducing the young girl’s observed behavioral health symptoms.

“That’s why I love my job; it’s so rewarding,” Munford says. “Helping that family get back on track, there’s that satisfaction in helping them learn that crisis is normal. Every family will have a crisis,” Munford says. “It’s learning how to live within your chaos and manage the things you have going on.”

*“BHSB supports us tremendously. They take the approach of partnership with B-CARS — trying to make sure they’re advocating for resources on our behalf and always being available for consultation.”*

— Ginna Wagner

Director of Baltimore Child and Adolescent Response System