

Dancing for Catholic Charities, and a chance at YouTube fame

By [KERRY BENEFIELD](#)
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Monday, April 18, 2011 at 5:42 p.m.

Leaning way back, arms flopping crazily at his sides, Cardinal Newman High School freshman Nathan Berry did his best "Bernie" dance move.

Berry, performing along with about 75 other Newman and Ursuline High School students for a promotional video for Catholic Charities Family Support Center in Santa Rosa, hopes the not-yet-finished video goes viral.

"I like dancing," he said with a laugh. "I think that I'm good at it, but I've been told different."

Under dreary early afternoon skies, two waves about 75-students strong from Newman and Ursuline performed their best "Bernies," "Sprinklers" and "Shopping Carts" to a continuous loop of Michael Jackson's "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" for a video that will be debuted at the annual Catholic Charities Family Support center open house.

Operators of the shelter, which houses up to 138 people a night while also offering meals, tutoring, career counseling and other services, thought a tongue-in-cheek dance video modeled after the YouTube sensation "Pink Glove Dance" might draw attention to the shelter's operations and the county's needs.

"We are basically filming a little video, meant to be upbeat and peppy, showing how all of the different partners and members of Catholic Charities are unified in ending local poverty," said Rebecca Kendall, director of stewardship with the group and an enthusiastic dancer in Monday's filming.

Backers are still trying to work out copyright issues associated with using the Jackson tune if it's posted on YouTube, but it will definitely be debuted at the annual open house at the Catholic Charities Family Support Center May 6.

The shelter, the largest family shelter from San Francisco to Portland, serves people in need of all religious on non-religious backgrounds, Kendall said.

"We don't proselytize in any way," she said. "We don't even know if any of our clients are Catholic or not because we don't ask."

Sonoma County's poverty rate is the highest in 16 years and a January 2009 census found that there were 3,247 homeless people in Sonoma County.

Hunger also is on the rise locally. About 78,000 county residents seek hunger relief every month through the Redwood Empire Food Bank and partnering agencies, including Catholic Charities. That reflects an increase of about 28,000 people over almost three years.

Fresh off her scene among masses of high schoolers, Catholic Charities volunteer Judith Perry of Monte Rio said she was happy with her moves — even if she didn't realize that they will likely end up floating around YouTube soon.

“Oh goody goody. I didn't know that part,” she said with a laugh. “It's lots of fun. I think it's great.”

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