



MercyLink

connecting the MercyFirst Community

Fall 2015

Message from the CEO: If not MercyFirst, then who?

Over the years, the needs of children who come to MercyFirst have changed. This situation is not just true for MercyFirst, but for everything in life. Nothing ever stays the same. Our jobs have gotten more challenging! Traffic has gotten more difficult and the list goes on!

We became a Sanctuary Certified agency in 2009; the largest agency in the country to be certified in this trauma-informed approach that guides our work. We added new services and approaches to be more effective in engaging our young people and help them understand and deal with trauma that has affected them through no fault of their own.

Our campus went from working just with boys to going co-ed in 2010 because there were many girls in need of this level of care. We began providing art therapy on a limited basis 3 years ago to help youth deal with their feelings. We found it was so effective that we expanded it through additional staff and the use of Masters level students and it is now woven in the fabric of what we do. We use a Therapeutic Equine program on Long Island that is incredibly powerful in connecting with our girls; in addition to our therapeutic dog program. We shifted to using smaller facilities with fewer residents so we can better individualize the work we do and reduce the distractions that come with more youth in one place. We implemented Evidence-based clinical services - SPARCS (Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress) and TF-CBT (Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) - so we are more consistent and effective in our work.

At MercyFirst we responded to the challenges before us by changing what we do for our children and youth. This newsletter is filled with examples of what I speak about. Like the Molloy student who volunteers doing art projects at Merrick House; or our good friends at Junket who volunteer to mentor our foster teens and who worked with them to create artwork that now graces our new Youth Reception Center in Brooklyn; or the Yoga Instructor who teaches our teens how to relax through meditation.

We did all this because as we saw the needs of our children changing we asked ourselves whether MercyFirst was going to change to meet these needs? If MercyFirst was not going to step up, who would? So we did and we will continue to change and adapt and improve what we do. If not MercyFirst, then who?

- Jerry McCaffery, President/CEO

Save the Date

Thursday, November 5, 2015
Angel of Hope Event
Tribeca Rooftop, NYC

Recent Grants

RTS Family Foundation
\$75,000, Preventive Services

Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic
\$15,000, Art Therapy Program

Frank J. Antun Foundation
\$10,000, Bridges to the Future

Community Car Wash Raised \$400!

In August, MercyFirst's Youth Leadership Council held their first Car Wash in conjunction with the Church of the Intercessor. Members of the Church of the Intercessor wanted a way to give back to the community and decided to collaborate with the Youth Leadership Council. The Car Wash raised \$400! This wonderful donation will assist the Youth Leadership Council with future community service and advocacy projects.



Volunteer Spotlight:

Q & A with Thomas Agostino

How did you connect with MercyFirst? I initially heard about MercyFirst through some Social Work and Art Therapy courses at Molloy College, Rockville Centre, NY. After speaking with Elaine Frazier, MercyFirst Youth Development Supervisor, she set me up as a volunteer art teacher at Merrick House, group home for boys.

What type of work have you done with the youth? I really wanted to appeal to the boys and I didn't want my time with them to be another homework assignment for them on top of their already stressful lives, so I really dove in when it came to learning about what they liked, both as individuals and on a house-wide scale. The boys at Merrick House, I found are very hands on, and simple drawing and painting lessons would only be engaging to them if the content was something they were interested in, so I had to brush up on my mechanical drawing skills, so I could show the guys how to draw the high-end sports cars, motorcycles and construction vehicles they were so passionate about. This isn't the only work I've done with them of course, every other session I had with the boys was tempered with an alternative type of project, either a 3D medium like clay sculptures and painting or model building, or some outside chalk drawing that allowed the boys to be creative and physically active at the same time.



Thomas and the youth worked with clay during a visit.



Your experience so far? So far my experience working through MercyFirst has been incredibly enlightening. I've learned things about interacting with kids on a meaningful level that I hadn't been taught yet in a class room setting. I've built up a bit of a relationship with each of the boys living at the home now, and while some of them still know me better than others, it is very satisfying seeing and feeling some of their initial wariness of me fade away.

From the staff at Merrick House: Thomas volunteering has brought the boys together, they learn from each other and give each other positive feedback on their artwork...Thomas brings a calm positive vibe to the house...it's a safe time where residents can express themselves...Thomas always listens to the boys about what they would like to do the following week as well as brings his own ideas and materials to inspire them.

The Merrick boys said that Tom is great because...

I love art and he's a good teacher!

he makes me feel good

he is fun and nice

he's helpful and teaches me how to draw

United We Om

This summer MercyFirst had the opportunity to provide our youth an 8 session seminar on Mindfulness, Meditation and Yoga in collaboration with the organization *United We Om*. *United We Om's* goal is to amplify the spirit of service in the Yoga and Meditation communities and magnify the positive shift in our global consciousness. *United We Om* provided a Mindfulness, Meditation and Yoga instructor who taught our youth the Mindfulness & Meditation Program B.R.E.A.T.H.E. System for Adolescents. "Learning to Breathe" is a mindfulness based curriculum developed by Dr. Patricia Broderick, that is intended to strengthen emotion regulation and attention, expand adolescents repertoire of stress management skills and help them integrate mindfulness into daily life. Youth really enjoyed the program and look forward to continuing this experience in the upcoming months.

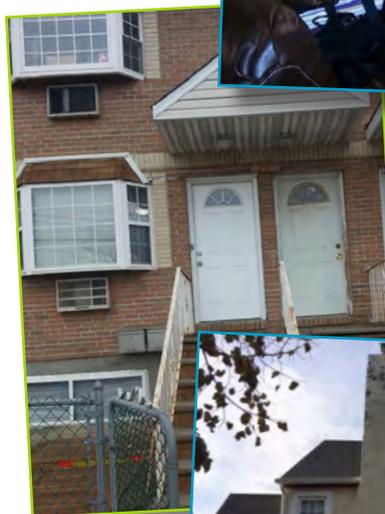


Youth enjoying moments of peace and relaxation.

Mother/Baby Program Expands

During the Spring months, MercyFirst returned to South Ozone Park, Queens, NY, to re-open a Mother/Baby residence. MercyFirst had operated at the facility, Manning Residence, for many years, but closed 5 years ago due to programming changes. The facility received a face-lift and will again be home to three teen mothers and their babies. Shortly after Manning Residence was up and running, MercyFirst opened its fourth Mother/Baby Residence in St. Albans, Queens, NY also for three teen mothers and their babies.

The Mother/Baby program has shifted from larger homes with more girls to smaller locations. The move to smaller facilities will enhance safety and offer better opportunities for the girls to engage in meaningful treatment and planning for their future.



Educational Success of our Youth

- ★ This year at the Annual Daniel J. McCarthy Jr. Scholarship Dinner, **26** youth were celebrated for their achievements and awarded scholarships. Over 100 friends, staff and youth were in attendance at the event held at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.
- ★ During the past school year MercyFirst youth excelled in their educational achievements. Our Youth Development Department reported that **4** youth graduated from college with Bachelors and Associates Degrees. A total of **16** students in our Family Foster Care and Residential programs graduated from High School or completed their GED.
- ★ The Fall 2015 semester brings along more success! MercyFirst has **10** new students enrolled in college. This increases the total number of students who are currently participating in the *Scholarship Program* to **30**. These are great achievements which the staff, students and families are very proud of.



A Wonderful Visit

Through Facebook, MercyFirst is able to connect to people who either themselves or a family member were adopted through our Brooklyn location, Angel Guardian Home. Given that we started doing adoptions after it was founded in 1899 and did all the adoptions for the Brooklyn Diocese until around 1970, we are talking about thousands of people. We recently connected with Michelle Prymas-Realtor who came to Angel Guardian as an infant and was adopted along with her twin sister. In July, Michelle visited with us at Angel Guardian. She came with her two daughters and one of their friends. We found her visit to be so reaffirming as we listened to how well she has done in life and how caring and wonderful her parents were in raising her and her sister. All that they did now lives on in Michelle and how she is raising her daughters. Nothing in life is perfect or without challenges but this was just a wonderful visit.



Beautiful view of the original chapel.



The group stands in the Garden of Angels at the Angel Guardian Campus.

Want a way to honor your family or a special person? Consider purchasing a brick in the Garden of Angels.

Contact the Development Department 516.921.0808 x 161

Catherine's Corner: The History of Mercy Day

From the time she was a little girl, Catherine McAuley felt a great compassion for the poor, especially women and children. She inherited her great compassion from the example set for her by her father James, whom she loved dearly. He died when Catherine was only five years old. Her mother, Elinor, died when Catherine was young as well, causing Catherine and her siblings to live with various family members. You could say that Catherine was orphaned and was a Foster Child.

In 1824, Catherine inherited a large sum of money from the Callaghan family. They were an elderly couple that she lived with so that she could be a companion for and care for Mrs. Callaghan who was sick. Catherine used this money to lease property on Baggot Street, a well-to-do neighborhood in Dublin, for the purpose of building a large house for religious, educational and social services for women and children. Other women were interested in Catherine's plans and began to join her preparations for the ministry.

On September 24, 1827, the house was opened. By coincidence, or act of providence, it was also the date of the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, and thus they claimed an identity and a spirit for their building and its works, naming it the House of Mercy. Over time, the House of Mercy and its works flourished- the first year saw two hundred girls enrolled in the school; the ministry of education were added; the visitation of the sick and poor, and a refuge for young abused women. Many volunteers, inspired by Catherine's work and spirit, joined their energies to hers.

Between late 1829 and 1830, after prayerful deliberation and consultation, Catherine and her associates agreed to found a new religious congregation of women dedicated to the service of the poor, sick and ignorant. Her great love for Our Lady of Mercy is the reason that she decided to call this new Congregation, the Sisters of Mercy. The current global Mercy presence includes approximately ten thousand sisters who, together with the Mercy Associates, Mercy Volunteer Corps, Companions in Mercy, Co-ministers and our dedicated supporters, are continuing the work of Catherine McAuley in 46 countries.

On September 24th, 2015, 188 years from the date the first Mercy ministry was founded on Baggot Street, we celebrate this special feast of the Sisters of Mercy which we've come to call "Mercy Day" with our co-ministers and supporters here at MercyFirst. Together we continue living out Catherine McAuley's vision by living out MercyFirst's mission each day. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts! We can't do it without you.



Sr. Maureen King, RSM
VP of Mission Integration

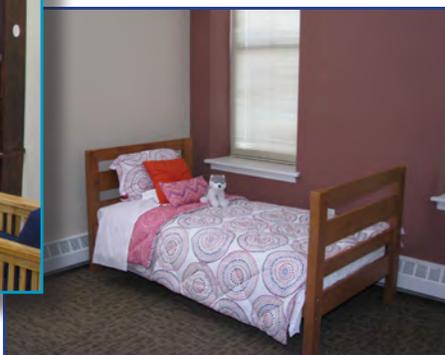
Youth Reception Center Open House

On July 16th, MercyFirst hosted an Open House in Brooklyn, NY to celebrate the newest program it is opening at the Virginia Residence.

For about 15 years, Virginia Residence was a mother-baby residence, 10 mothers and 10 babies, which MercyFirst operated through a contract with NYC Administration for Children's Services. Recently MercyFirst received approval to downsize the program and develop smaller sites at two different locations. After many months of construction and redesigning, the Virginia residence was transformed into a 12 bed Youth Reception Center for foster youth ages 14-20. Youth will be living at Virginia Residence while a more permanent living plan is decided upon.



Special guests and staff arrived throughout the 'Open House' to tour the house and see the wonderful transformation that took months to complete! During a brief program, Jerry McCaffery, MercyFirst President/CEO introduced the new program along with a representative from NYC ACS. Sister Maureen King, MercyFirst VP of Mission Integration, ended the program with a special blessing.



A Beautiful "Gift"

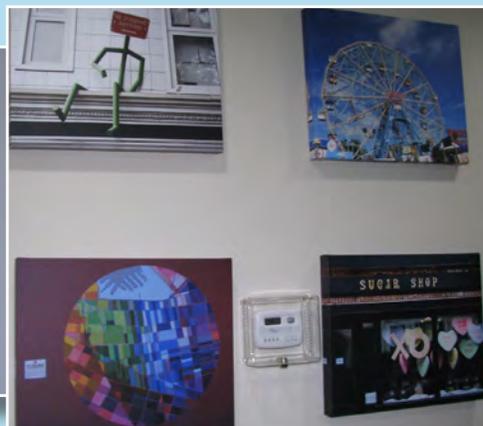
Zawadi and her mother visited MercyFirst, Angel Guardian Campus during the summer. The visit to Angel Guardian Campus was very special to Zawadi, as it was her first time seeing where she was adopted from. Zawadi is a bright articulate young woman whose name means "gift". Her mother believes that she has been a gift to her and the whole family. The Post Adoption Department at MercyFirst gets the opportunity to reunite adoptees with their early history. The Circle of Mercy is timeless....



Sister Maureen King, VP of Mission Integration and Sister Margaret Dempsey, Director of Personal Giving and Legacy Relations, welcomed Zawadi and her mother To MercyFirst. They gave them a tour of the campus and introduced them to staff who remembered Zawadi as a baby.

Junket Inc. Provides Inspiring Artwork

To complete the amazing transformation of Virginia Residence, inspiring artwork was provided by Junket Inc, a mentoring group for youth involved in the foster care system. Many MercyFirst youth participate in Junket and recently worked on a project titled "26 Boroughs of Brooklyn". The art project photographed all the boroughs of Brooklyn, NY and produced a set of postcards which best represents Brooklyn. Images from their collection were selected and installed at Virginia Residence to help in creating a welcoming and caring environment.





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MercyFirst Presents at NYC Art Therapy Conference

MercyFirst's Dr. Dawn Besemer, VP of Clinical Services, and Eileen McGann, Director of the Arts and Creative Therapies, were participants in the School of Visual Arts Annual Art Therapy Conference "The End of Carrying All". Featured keynote speaker was the internationally renowned Kenyan born artist, Wangechi Mutu. Ms. Mutu's work is included in the collections of MOMA, the Whitney, Studio Museum in Harlem, The Tate Modern and numerous other institutions around the world. Ms. Mutu discussed her art in relation to global issues of colonization, race, gender and the transformative power of art. Dr. Besemer presented the collaborative and integrative approach to treatment that is central to MercyFirst highlighting the significance of the Mission, Sanctuary and an informed approach to trauma with our youth. A panel discussion, moderated by Eileen McGann, included Dr. Besemer, Monica Duque art therapist at the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services and Wangechi Mutu. The panelists engaged in a lively discussion about how social, cultural and personal viewpoints impact perception, relationships, treatment and art therapy practice.



Eileen McGann, Dr. Dawn Besemer, Wangechi Mutu, Monica Duque (left to right)