



MercyLink

connecting the MercyFirst Community

Spring 2015

Message from the CEO: Hope is Unstoppable

At MercyFirst, we are always hopeful about what a new day and a new season brings – for our kids and for the agency. It is why in the midst of the recession we changed our tag line to reflect what we have always believed at MercyFirst - hope is unstoppable!

This is especially true given how difficult this last winter has been and especially how difficult the economy has been on all of us over the last few years. While deep in the throes of the recession, every family we work with has been under more financial pressure than usual. Every public agency we contract with to provide services for had to find ways to reduce expenses and do whatever it could do to get through these tough times. Private fundraising by MercyFirst stayed flat in the early years of the recession but then dropped off as many individuals and companies dug in for the long haul. Our staff have also been stretched farther than they should as MercyFirst has not been able to give raises of any kind over the past few years as government cut back on funding.

Now, as the first signs of spring can be seen with the snow melting and green buds starting to form on trees and bushes, we continue to remain hopeful. Recently, we were asked by ACS to pilot an evidence-based model called *Partnering for Success* to see how effective this approach can be in improving the well-being of children in family foster care. Over the last few months, we opened two new *mother-baby residences* in Queens with each caring for 3 teen moms and their child. In March, we were awarded a contract by ACS to open a new program called the *Youth Reception Center* at a facility in Brooklyn we are now renovating. This program will work with foster teens who have not succeeded so far in the difficult life and circumstances they have been handed. Like all our programs, this one will provide a full range of services to engage and stabilize these youth and to see how we can work together to give them a new start in life.

While we are all familiar with the phrase “Hope Springs Eternal”, at MercyFirst we have our own take on this approach to life and to life’s challenges that our children and families are faced with!

- Jerry McCaffery, President/CEO

MercyFirst youth participates in NYC art gallery exhibition!

Latik W., a youth at MercyFirst’s Syosset campus, participated in an art exhibition, titled “*Open Invitation*” at the School of Visual Arts FLATIRON GALLERY in New York City. This exhibition featured works by young people participating in art therapy programs along with their art therapist. Meghan Lyons, MercyFirst art therapy intern and Latik worked together to create works that would reflect personal meaning. Latik submitted his figure drawings of Superheroes, along with a detailed and descriptive narrative story entitled “The Eccentric 6”, to accompany the images.

“His pleasure in the art, exhibition and recognition as an accomplished artist are as clear as the joy on his face. Congratulations Latik!”, Eileen McGann, ATR-BC, LCAT, MercyFirst Director of the Arts and Creative Therapies.



Save the Date

Monday, May 18, 2015

Spring Golf Outing
Tam O’Shanter Club & The Creek

Thursday, June 18, 2015

The Daniel J. McCarthy, Jr.
Scholarship Dinner
Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Recent Gifts

TD Charitable Foundation, \$7,500
Bridges to the Future

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

VFW Post 3230 Capt. Vincent F.
Atene Post, \$5,000
General Support

Angelo Silveri, \$5,000
Building Repairs

Victoria Loconsolo Foundation Inc.,
\$5,000
Holiday Donation

Catherine's Corner

A New Year dawns and everywhere there are prayers for peace. Yet all around us there seems to be unrest, terror, disputes, disagreements and disrespect. Protesters cry:

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE.

As followers of Catherine McAuley, we look to the scriptures, Psalm 85 which remind us that "Love and Truth shall meet and Justice and Peace shall kiss." Amidst the turmoil in the lives of our families, teens and children our role as members of the MercyFirst community is to provide an atmosphere where Psalm 85 can be a reality.

To our benefactors and supporters, we thank you for being Mercy with us. We could not do what we do without you.

To our administration, staff and volunteers, we thank you for showing our families, teens and children the face of the merciful God. As we begin our 121 consecutive year of helping children and families, we count on God's providence to help us to allow "Love and Truth to meet and Justice and Peace to kiss."

Sister Margaret Dempsey, RSM,
Director of Personal Giving and Legacy Relations

Student Shouts Out!

Keri Downs is a Psychology Intern at MercyFirst. As our mission states to "inspire hope and promote healing", Ms. Downs has been working with a young man who is a resident on the Syosset campus. Through their sessions, Ms. Downs is teaching him the skills and helping him discuss his trauma. The young man is very grateful for Ms. Downs as she has helped him acknowledge and heal from his trauma, he wrote a very inspiring "Shout Out" to her and wants everyone to know how she has impacted his life.

"I wanted to give a shout out to my clinician and friend Ms. Keri. She always has nothing but positive things to say to me, even when I mess up. Ms. Keri always supports me and even when I mess up. Ms. Keri always supports me and even when I do something wrong she always makes me realize the good side of it and always makes me feel like its not the end of the world. Even when I am having a bad day she's always there to make me feel good. Anytime I am feeling down Ms. Keri always there to make me feel better. Anytime I'm feeling down Ms. Keri always can make my mood better. Ever since I met Ms. Keri she always let me know that I have potential to make it far and all the compliments and support she has given me has made me who I am today, and I have nothing but respect for Ms. Keri. Thank you for everything Ms. Keri, for everything!!!!!"



Meet Shawn

Shawn is a 19 year old resident in one of MercyFirst's Long Island Group Homes. He is a participant in MercyFirst's *Bridges to the Future* program, a youth development program which helps prepare youth for when they leave foster care. The program provides youth with skills and training that they need to secure jobs, scholarship assistance and financial help to live independently. Over the summer Shawn had an opportunity to internship at Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE) and worked in the Maintenance Department. His site supervisor said that Shawn was a fast learner, hard worker, and great asset to the department. The internship provided Shawn with valuable experience in landscaping, tree and plant maintenance as well as other areas of the department. These newly learned skills will help Shawn as he pursues a career in the future.

Because of his successful participation in the internship program, Shawn was honored in October at FREE's Annual Gala. He was recognized for his successful participation in the Ziegert Foundation sponsored internship program and Youth Leadership workshops, which provided support services for youth in Foster Care. At the Gala, Shawn spoke to the audience about his experiences. He told the audience, "I like everything about the work I did at the FREE agency, it was hard work but fun at the same time... It was a great internship. I got to learn new skills that will be good in my future... I know that I have to be responsible in making the right choices for myself, saving my money and planning for a great future to succeed and be a great role model for my brothers. My message to everyone who may share the same foster-care experience as me is " You can do anything if you put your mind to it!"

In January, Shawn graduated High School and is working full time at Pathmark and the Cheesecake Factory and is a Union member receiving benefits. The next step for Shawn is that he is looking to participate in the Youth Build program, which is a vocational training program, where he will build upon the skills learned at his internship program and continue to learn more about construction. Upon completion of the program, he will be placed with the department of Labor in a Construction Union program.



Shawn was honored and spoke at the 2014 FREE Annual Gala.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR HOLIDAY DONORS



Seaford High School delivered tons of holiday toys. (above)



Mrs. Pemberton and the Flatlands Lions Club, who have been supporting the Durr Prevention Holiday gift drive and party for years. (left)



Molloy College Social Work Students (above) hosted a holiday party for our older youth.

The Oddfellows hosted 25 youth for a day of games at Dave & Busters. (right)



Local 342 UFCW hosted a holiday dinner for over 40 MercyFirst Foster families. (left)



Southwoods Middle School in Syosset, NY, hosted a holiday food drive to help MercyFirst families. (above)

INDIVIDUALS

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Staff at North Shore LIJ Health System organized a tremendous donation this season. They sponsored over 20 MercyFirst families; getting gifts for everyone in the family! (right)



Our Friends at Kimco sponsored 25 teens this holiday season. (above)



Andrea Clifford and Robin Miller hosted "The Circle" party for over 50 local families who sponsored a group of residents. (left)



GEICO's Annual Holiday Toy Drive collected gifts for over 150 kids. (left and above)



Jeter's Leaders spent the afternoon at MercyFirst's Angel Guardian Campus with activities and gifts for children, teens and families. (above)



CYO Hickville collected toys and gifts for children of all ages. (left)

Our friends at Davis Vision collected toys for many of our teen youth. (right)



- Mr. and Mrs. Louis Rosati
- Mr. and Mrs. Alessandro C. Scarselli
- Mr. Michael Schaefer
- Mr. and Mrs. Walter Sellmann
- Mr. & Mrs. Peter Shabecoff
- Mr. and Mrs. Christopher J. Sheridan
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- Ms. Patricia M. Walsh
- Ms. Patrice M. Ward

- Mr. Donald Weimer
- Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Widlitz

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- Apostles of the Sacred Heart
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- BP Mechanical Corp.
- Carter's Levittown
- Catholic Youth Organization
- Columbiettes of Samuel Cardinal Stritch #4661, Knights of Columbus
- Columbiettes/Leisure Club
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- DAL Electrical Corp.
- Davis Vision
- Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation
- Divorced or Separated Catholics of Long Island, Inc.
- Federations of Italian-Americans
- Friends of Kate Hackett
- Friends of the Long Island Railroad
- GEICO Insurance
- Gildea & Ivanis LLP
- IBM Employee Services Center

- IL FIGLI DEL SUD
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- North Shore LIJ Health System
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- PENSCO Trust Company
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- P.S. 204
- Saint John Orthodox Church
- Seaford High School
- Signature Bank
- Sisters of St. Joseph
- St. Bernard's Church
- St. Bernard's Parish House
- St. Luke's Roman Catholic Church
- The Circle
- Tiny Tots Express, Inc.

- Turn 2 Foundation
- U.S. Customs & Border Protection
- UFW Local 342
- UPKAAR SARBHA
- Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk
- Verizon Communication, Inc.
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- Verizon Telecom Pioneers, Nova Five Chapter
- Victoria Loconsolo Foundation Inc.
- Voxx International Corporation
- Wells Fargo Community Support Campaign
- Women's Association Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church

To find out how you can donate to MercyFirst contact, **Kerri Sneden** at **516.921.0808 x 114** or email ksneden@mercyfirst.org

Board of Trustees Making News...

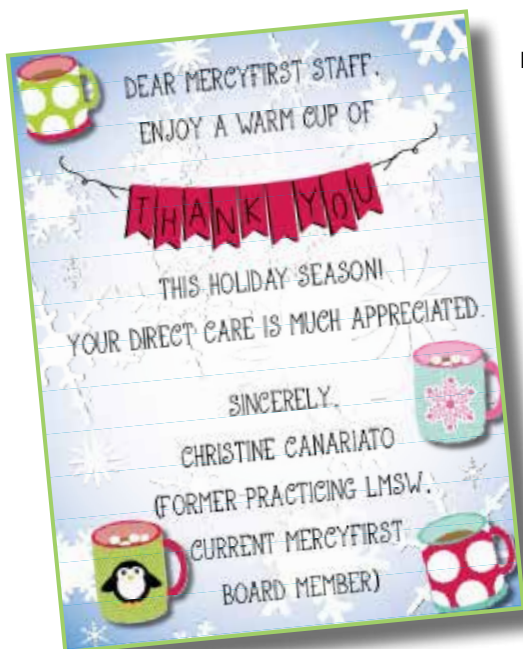
Annual Polar Bear Plunge!

MercyFirst Board Chair, Scott Gildea, and Yves Maco (husband of Board Member Rhonda Maco) started 2015 off with the Polar Bear Plunge in Coney Island. Both men set out to raise money for MercyFirst through this event. *Together they raised over \$14,000 in donations!*

It was certainly a chilly experience for them, but MercyFirst is very grateful for the dedication of its Board Members and friends!



Special Treat for Staff



Board of Trustees Member, Christine Canariato is a former practicing LMSW. So she knows first hand what the job is like for MercyFirst staff who work directly with the children. As a way to say “thank you”, Christine purchased 200 Starbucks gift cards and mailed one to each staff working in our Residential programs.

Congratulations Rhonda L. Maco, Esq.

Rhonda L. Maco, Esq., a member of our Board of Trustees, was one of the award recipients at this year's Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration held at the Long Island Marriott Hotel in Uniondale, NY. Ms. Maco is an esteemed member of the New York State Bar, and has been practicing law for over 10 years.

Rhonda was recognized for her commitment to community service and her work with community organizations. She volunteers at an after-school program, mentors students, works with the Girl Scouts of Nassau County, on the Board of Trustees at MercyFirst and the list goes on.



Welcome Paul Travers to the Board of Trustees

MercyFirst welcomes Paul Travers as the newest member of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Travers is a Portfolio Manager and member of the Management and Investment Committees of Onex Credit Partners. With over 30 years' experience in the field he has held positions at DiMaio Ahmad Capital, Merrill Lynch Asset Management, Bear Sterns & Co, Chase Manhattan Bank and others.

Paul earned his BA in Economics from State University of New York at Albany and his MBA from Fordham University. He lives in Westport, Connecticut with his wife Margaret. They have three grown children who live in New York, Boston and Charleston.

Paul Travers has a special connection to MercyFirst, one that dates back to his childhood. As an infant, Paul was adopted from Angel Guardian Home in Brooklyn, NY, which is today called MercyFirst. Upon joining the Board of Trustees, Paul received an overwhelming amount of support from his family and friends, raising over \$10,000 for MercyFirst!



Paul Travers with his daughter and wife at MercyFirst's Angel of Hope Event in November 2014.



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The Frank J. Antun Foundation Supports *Bridges to the Future*

A recent grant from the Frank J. Antun Foundation allowed for MercyFirst's *Bridges to the Future* program to offer new paid internship experiences at Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE) on Long Island. The program is split into two five-week sessions where youth can work up to 14 hours per week at the job site. In the past, *Bridges to the Future* only had funding to support Summer Internship experiences for youth in MercyFirst's Residential programs, but with the generous support from the Frank J. Antun Foundation, new career exploration services for youth are now available.

The first cycle started in January 2015, with two youth working as Clerical Assistants and two working as Property Mechanic Assistants. The daily activities of the youth in the Clerical positions range from data entry, filing, preparing reports, greeting visitors and other general office related tasks. The Mechanic assistants are responsible for building maintenance, landscaping, and painting.

The men and women participating in *Bridges to the Future* are exposed to a variety of careers while receiving coaching, training and emotional support. The internship experiences are extremely beneficial to the youth as they gain valuable work and life skills that will assist them as they enter adulthood and transition out of foster care. They enjoy their jobs and take great pride in working in professional atmospheres. In a midterm report, FREE staff commented on the youth's "positive attitude and willingness to assist wherever needed", and [She] has embraced this opportunity".



The five-week session concluded with a recognition ceremony for the youth. They got to speak about their internship at FREE and share about the program. One of the youth told the audience that, "This experience has opened my eyes and made me see I am a valuable person and have a lot to give back based on where I come from. This will not come easy but I am willing to put in hard work to overcome my downfalls." "I have learned to develop important professional life skills that will be beneficial in future jobs. I hope to pursue a career in Criminal Justice, and this internship has taught me basic skills that I will need to achieve my goal," said one of the young ladies about her experience working as a Clerical Assistant.

