



MercyLink

connecting the MercyFirst Community

Winter 2016

Message from the CEO: Planning for our Future

We just started our Strategic Planning Process at MercyFirst. It is something we do every 3-4 years to plan for our future. To say that doing this is difficult is putting it mildly.

Given the nature of the work we do, we have no control over the funding we receive for the programs we provide or whether we will get cost-of-living increases to cover basic increases in operating costs - rent, utilities, health insurance, Worker's Comp, and the list goes on. We deal with this by revisiting everything we do but also by delaying replacement of aging vehicles, not doing certain repair work on buildings and not giving raises to name but a few. None of these options is a good way to do business but such is the world we live in. This year was first time in 7 years that we got a cost-of-living increase.

We do our best to raise private money from individuals, companies and foundations but despite our best effort, the competition to raise private funds is intense. It is important to remember that just about every program MercyFirst provides is in lieu of government doing it themselves. Our advantage is that we are committed to doing this work because it is our mission and our commitment means we can provide these services better and more cost effectively than government doing it themselves.

Despite having so much that is out of our control, planning is the only way to try to shape who we are as an organization. An outgrowth of prior Strategic Planning was to pursue becoming a **trauma-informed** organization in 2006 and eventually to become a certified **Sanctuary** agency. It is because of our planning that we decided to make our **campus co-ed** in 2010 and work with adolescent girls at this level. Our **Scholarship Program** was a need we identified that is supported entirely by private funds to help our older youth go to college or vocational school. Working with our young people in **smaller residential settings** to better meet their needs on a more personal level was also an outgrowth of planning, as was our decision to provide **evidence-based services** in our programs.

Given the work that we do, we never run out of challenges. Our commitment to doing the best we can for the children in our care and their families will always open up new ways of doing our work in the months and years ahead. Stay tuned!

- Jerry McCaffery, President/CEO

Tech4Teens Essay Contest

In December, a youth from MercyFirst's Mother/Baby Residence, Ivanna P., won first place in an essay contest for Tech4 Teens. As the winner of the contest, Ivanna won a new laptop!

Ivanna's winning essay spoke about how she uses technology to better herself. She wrote that having access to a cell phone and the internet helps her to keep in touch with her family and friends even when she is not living with them. Having the connection to her friends and family helps her to be calm and safe when she would otherwise become upset. Most importantly, she wrote 'I am able to call my daughter while I have breaks during my school day and check up on her.' Ivanna said that technology is helping her with her education by opening up communication with teachers and how much easier it is for her to complete work for school. Ivanna was very excited to win the contest and receive her laptop. The laptop will be a big help to her as she goes to college next September.



Save the Date

Monday, May 16, 2016
Spring Golf Outing
Tam O'Shanter Club & The Creek

Thursday, June 23, 2016
The Daniel & Virginia McCarthy
Scholarship Dinner
Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Recent Gifts

TD Charitable Foundation, \$5,000
Bridges to the Future

Angelo Silveri, \$5,000
Building Repairs

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

Catherine's Corner

Pope Francis has declared 2016 an Extraordinary Jubilee, a Holy Year of Mercy. The Year of Mercy began on December 8, 2015, and will conclude on November 20, 2016. The Pope stated that in this coming Year of Mercy, "the Holy Door will become a Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God."

How gifted we are to be named Mercy during this extraordinary jubilee year! We are reminded of Pope Francis' words in announcing this Year of Mercy: "What moved Jesus ... was nothing other than mercy, with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest need."

All over the world, images of opening doors to the Jubilee Year of Mercy has hopefully caught our attention and filled us with hope. We celebrated it here at MercyFirst on December 9th with about 50 staff and Sisters in attendance. The celebration makes us feel connected with all other Mercy ministries around the world who have also responded to Pope Francis' proclamation of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. We long for the day when the people we serve, the most vulnerable, will be able to say that because of the Year of Mercy, they experienced our deep conversion as well as the transformation of systems and relationships. Let us keep asking ourselves as this year progresses, how will we be a part of ensuring that the Pope's proclamation lives on here at MercyFirst? What is the invitation to each of us as friends and supporters to make Mercy more real to those we serve at MercyFirst? Have a healthy, blessed and merciful 2016!

Sister Maureen King RSM, VP of Mission Integration

Mercy Corp Volunteers Bring Their Unique Gifts to MercyFirst



Nicole and Kaitlin attended the Angel of Hope event back in November.

August 2015 marked the arrival of two new people to MercyFirst, Nicole Panza and Kaitlin Dinkelacker who began their year of service as Mercy Corp Volunteers. Nicole is 23 years old and a graduate of Boston College where she majored in Applied Psychology. Nicole found out about Mercy Corp at a service day at her college and was interested in the work we do at MercyFirst. Kaitlin is 24 years old and graduated from Cincinnati Christian University with a major in Psychology. Last year Kaitlin spent a year in California in a residential program for troubled teens.

Both Nicole and Kaitlin work in the Youth Development Department at the Angel Guardian Campus in Brooklyn. In Nicole's current role, she recruits mentors for our more than 200 youth in foster care, as well as searches for tutoring services for youth. Her involvement also includes working with our young people who are in the first year of college and assisting them in a variety of ways to make sure they are successful in their schooling. Nicole has participated in Youth Development events, including a skating outing at Bryant Park and Lobby Day in Albany, NY where she, along with other MercyFirst staff and two youth met with our government officials to inform them of the needs in Foster Care. Kaitlin is responsible for helping our 12th graders with college applications. She also has accompanied youth on college tours and worked with the youth, who are aging out

of foster care, to find housing and other necessities. She loves working in the field and the exposure to MercyFirst youth. She feels that this work helps her to constantly learn new things. She has also been helping to produce the Youth Development Newsletter, which goes out to all of our older foster care youth.

Nicole and Kaitlin live in Community with three other Mercy Volunteers in St. Sebastian's Parish in Woodside, Queens. They both agreed that living simply and frugally in Community is so different from the "every person for themselves mentality". They believe that the time spent in sharing their spirituality and the three retreats that are a part of the years' experience help to give them the ability to live this year to the fullest.

As they think about next year they are grateful for this experience. Nicole is applying to study for her masters in social work and Kaitlin is looking both in New York and Cincinnati for a job and is planning to complete her MSW in the future.

Their happy and vivacious Mercy spirits have been a wonderful presence at the Angel Guardian Campus and their love and commitment to our mission has been a gift to the youth they serve and the Youth Development Department with whom they work. We have been so lucky to have them working with us.



Virginia McCarthy: A generous spirit who will be missed by all

Earlier this year, MercyFirst suffered a great loss of our dear friend, Virginia McCarthy. In 2008, after the sudden loss of her husband of 49 years, Daniel J. McCarthy, Jr., MercyFirst's Annual Scholarship Dinner and Scholarship Fund was established and named in his honor. This year, our 8th Annual Scholarship Dinner, will be renamed the *Daniel and Virginia McCarthy Scholarship Dinner*.

Daniel and Virginia's commitment to education was a fundamental part of their family life. Dan and Virginia met when they were students at Fordham University, and all six of their children graduated from Catholic Universities and went on to earn Graduate degrees. They have sixteen grandchildren, many of whom have already completed their higher education or are working towards completion.

Virginia gave much of her time to those in need. She spent time volunteering in school libraries, the Aberdeen First Aid Squad, St. Benedict Church, Manna House, an organization that provides a home and skills training for mothers and their children, and several other organizations, as well as supporting friends when they were ill or otherwise in need. She was a faithful fan of her children's and grand-children's various sports, theater, and other activities. Above all, she had a big heart and a wise and generous spirit. In 2014 MercyFirst presented Virginia with the *Catherine McAuley Leadership Award*. This award was given to honor her dedication and commitment to helping those less fortunate. The McCarthy legacy will live on at MercyFirst year after year through the Daniel J. McCarthy Scholarship Fund and the Daniel and Virginia Scholarship Dinner.

The Daniel and Virginia McCarthy Scholarship Dinner is being held on Thursday, June 23, 2016 at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. If you would like to make a donation in their memory, please call Kerri Sneden at 516-921-0808 ext. 114 or ksneden@mercyfirst.org.



The McCarthy family and friends attend the Scholarship Dinner each year and present scholarships to young people who are pursuing their higher education.



Jerry McCaffery, MercyFirst CEO, presented Virginia McCarthy with the Catherine McAuley Leadership Award for her dedication and support of the Scholarship Program.

Annual Polar Bear Plunge!

MercyFirst Board Chair, Scott Gildea, Yves Maco (husband of Board Member Rhonda Maco) and newest/youngest recruit, Alexandra Emma started 2016 off with the Polar Bear Plunge in Coney Island. These three set out to raise money for MercyFirst through this event. **Together they raised over \$19,000 in donations!**

Thank you to Scott, Yves, Alexandra, friends and family members for taking the chilly plunge for MercyFirst!



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR HOLIDAY DONORS



Support from Signature Bank. (below)



The Law Offices of Rachel Perry hosted a holiday toy drive for our teens. (right)



Donation from Toys for Tots (below)

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



Bob Lohrey with Sr. Margaret and Sr. Maureen in Brooklyn. (right)



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

James Biello Associates filled gift boxes for 50 youth at MercyFirst. (right)

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Catholic Teachers Association of
The Diocese of Brooklyn, Inc
Catholic Youth Organization
Columbiettes - Leisure Club
D & J's Printing Company



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

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



The Law Offices of Printz & Goldstein collected toys for teens. (above)



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! (left)



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

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



Our friends at Merrill Lynch sponsored a toy drive for youth of all ages! (above)



Joseph Diana, setup a donation bin at his school, St. Theresa's, in Staten Island. (left)



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





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Kids Helping Kids...HOPE Holds No Borders

In the spirit of the season of Peace and Hope, the youth at MercyFirst embarked on journey that connects them with children from the other side of the world. A recent collaboration between the Arts and Creative Therapies program at MercyFirst and Project Lift in Istanbul, Turkey resulted in an exchange of art and hope for the future.

In their art project, MercyFirst youth explored what it means to be safe, to have a home, and the impact that violence has on communities, families and children, regardless of country. Given their own background, they related to the violence that families experience in war torn areas of the world and the migration and refugees that results. Discussion about the universal needs of all people and the impact that small actions can have in creating meaning in another person's life were central in this experience. Youth from MercyFirst created drawings and videos with messages of hope and concern and sent these to Syrian refugee children living in Istanbul. A wonderful surprise to our community occurred.

Children in Turkey created postcards with images and messages of hope for the youth at MercyFirst



In response, the Syrian refugee children created images and messages of gratitude for being remembered, and their hope for peace and friendship. They wrote to us "We send you love and art from Istanbul...Born in Syria, we took refuge in Turkey, we are not bound by borders. We are world citizens, so we left our fingerprints for you to see all over the world"



Artwork was on display during a presentation made by Eileen McGann for MercyFirst students and staff.

This collaboration between MercyFirst and Project Lift will be an ongoing exchange. The program came about through professional connections that Eileen McGann, Director of the Arts and Creative Therapies at MercyFirst, has with Leyla Acka, an Art Therapist in Turkey.