



MercyLink

connecting the MercyFirst Community

Fall 2010/Winter 2011

Letter from the CEO

All around us we hear constant talk these days of the need to cut taxes and eliminate wasteful spending by government at every level. After all, who wants to pay taxes? And who does not believe we should be living within one's means?

Yet, when people hear of the work we do at MercyFirst and that it is paid for primarily by public funds they are quick to add "I don't mean to cut funding for what MercyFirst does...but for other things that are wasteful and not necessary".

I usually do not write articles for our newsletter that touch on issues of politics. I stick to writing about the children and youth in our care and the work we do with families at MercyFirst. However, these issues are so inexorably connected to each other these days that it is hard not to talk about one when I am trying to talk about the other.

By the time this newsletter is distributed, MercyFirst will have just closed four group homes for teenagers including a mother-baby residence. Together they provided a home for about 30 teens. These are teens that have been abused and neglected and who faced more challenges in their short lives than most adults ever have to. The programs closed not because there is no need or they received poor evaluations, they closed because of government budget cuts.

My challenge to you is to not lose sight of programs like MercyFirst when we make budget decisions that affect services in our community. Let us carefully weigh the value of them before we decide what is best to do. Putting aside the tough issue of budgets for the moment, our mission at MercyFirst remains critical: to be involved in the survival and success of the children in our care.

2010 was a memorable year because we confronted the challenges and uncertainty before us, and we were able to sustain quality and effective programs. Our accomplishments came about through the hard work and support of our Board of Trustees, staff and friends.

As one year ends and a new one begins, it is important to note major accomplishments that took place:

- **Governance:** The Board of Trustees used this year to carry out new ways of operating: new officers, new trustees, term limits and restructuring of Committees to strengthen the Board's ability to support the agency's mission.
- **Financial Stability:** MercyFirst ended the fourth year in a row with a balanced budget; met its fund-raising goal; and increased our Endowment Fund.
- **Bridges to the Future:** The highlight of this new initiative was the awarding of 19 scholarships to youth attending college or vocational school at our second Daniel J. McCarthy, Jr. Scholarship Dinner in June. We just secured foundation support to help us better prepare and support our older youth to live successfully in the community;
- **Sanctuary Certification:** MercyFirst was awarded Sanctuary Certification in January 2010 for successful implementation of this innovative trauma informed approach throughout all its programs. We became the largest agency in the country to receive this recognition and the first to earn it for all our programs.

Thank you for your support of our efforts in these challenging times.

Jerry McCaffery, President/CEO

Catherine's Corner

"To Leave All To God"

Ellen Josephine Haire was the daughter of Edmund and Catherine Haire, and was born in Ennis County Clare in Ireland in 1821. She received the habit of the Sisters of Mercy in 1845. At the age of 25, Mary Vincent Haire volunteered to leave her homeland, her family and her sisters to come to New York. She was the first Sister of Mercy professed in New York at the old St. Patrick's Cathedral. Eight years later, in 1855, she came to Brooklyn with five other sisters, "to establish a large free school and attend to the visitation of the sick and the instruction of the uneducated." However, people by the scores brought orphans and children to their doors and Mother Vincent responded to the needs of her times. She opened the doors and let them in. This openness in responding to need led to a very early change in the ministry of the sisters. They came to teach and were called into social ministry. By 1862, they were caring for 500 children.

One of Mother Vincent's greatest leadership qualities seemed to be her openness to risk and trying new things. Her legacy to us is one of commitment to the works of mercy, openness to new ministries, connecting the rich to help the poor, and let go when she had to.

Do we have the courage, compassion, and commitment to, "open the doors" and respond to the child welfare needs of our times? I am confident that we can respond with a resounding, "YES" because of the good work of our administration, staff, and board members; and to you, our generous benefactors, who have chosen to "connect with us." Your support and assistance enables us to develop and identify new programs that will address today's needs of our youth, our children and families.

May God in Mercy bless and protect you and your loved ones.

Sr. M. Seton Agovino, VP of Mission Integration

"January in Jammies"

MercyFirst received a donation of over 200 pairs of brand new pajamas from the Newbridge Road Elementary School Student Council, located in Bellmore, NY. The Student Council wanted to find a way to help the kids at MercyFirst so they created the project called "January in Jammies".

The youth in our Group Homes and Preventive Services programs were grateful to receive the warm pajamas from our new friends!



The Newbridge Road Elementary School Student Council.

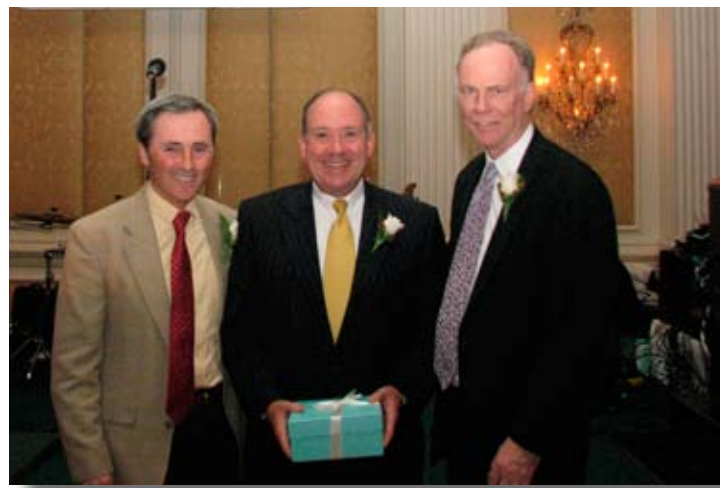
Annual Harvest Ball

On Thursday, November 4, 2010 over 250 supporters gathered for MercyFirst's Annual Harvest Ball held at The Garden City Hotel in Garden City, NY. With the generosity of all the sponsors and supporters, this year's event raised over \$120,000 to help fund MercyFirst's programs. The 2010 Honoree was Thomas M. O'Brien, President and



Special tribute made to Joseph H. Farrell.

CEO of State Bank. Mr. O'Brien and State Bank have been longtime supporters and good friends to the children of MercyFirst. A special tribute was made to longtime MercyFirst Board Member Joseph H. Farrell, who has been dedicated to the mission of MercyFirst for over 40 years.



MercyFirst Board of Trustees President, Kevin Shine, Honoree Thomas O'Brien, and President/CEO Gerard McCaffery

Advantage After-School Program

"Feed the Needy"

MercyFirst Advantage After-School program, in conjunction with the Uniondale High School Freshman Class, held their 3rd Annual Thanksgiving *Feed the Needy* Project. This collaboration benefited the Rosa Parks Homeless shelter in Roosevelt Long Island, which provides vital services to at risk families. Starting in October the after school participants began a food drive in which many students, faculty and MercyFirst staff generously donated food. The food was cooked under the supervision of the home economics teacher Ms. Green and MercyFirst staff. Prepared with care and love, the shelter residences were provided with a delicious and healthy feast. The food was delivered to the homeless shelter on November 24th, just in time for their Thanksgiving Day celebration. The commitment and spirit demonstrated by our students and staff exemplifies the core values of our mission, in support of community. As a fixture in the school for the past 5 years, the Advantage program, which is funded by OCFs provides students with stability and structured activities. The program continues to be a pivotal alternative to the street for many students who consistently attend on a daily basis.

A Preventive Family Says "Thank You" to a Generous Donor

Dear Frank* and Vicky*,

My name is Natasha* and my husband is Kelvin*. As you may know we have 4 beautiful children. Recently, we have experienced great hardship, and have been trying to stabilize our family. The gifts that you gave us this holiday season have done more for us than you can imagine. They reminded us that there are people out there who have the love of God in their hearts. You were willing to take the time out to bless our family, and for that, we can't thank you enough. Every gift that we received was much needed and appreciated. We have also enclosed some pictures from Christmas, and hope that you can share the joy you gave to us by seeing them. May God bless you and your family. Thank you so much for caring.

Love, The Perry* Family

**The names in this letter have been changed to protect the privacy of the families.*

MercyFirst Youth "Getting Beyond the System"

Every Tuesday afternoon, four students from MercyFirst have been participating in a Seminar, entitled "Getting Beyond the System," held at Hofstra University. The 12-week Seminar is being offered by the Youth Advocacy Center, which helps disadvantaged youths, primarily young people involved with the foster care, juvenile justice and other government systems, prepare for the transition to adulthood and independence.

Rather than lecturing on how to get a job, or how to live on your own, or how to apply to college, the instructors use two educational methods to study and analyze "cases" or stories about young people struggling to overcome a challenge to reach a goal - the Socratic Method and the Case Method. The Socratic Method calls upon students to be active learners and use their critical analytical skills and the "cases" are designed to relate to the student's experiences and future interests and help a student understand the self-advocacy process.

Using the content of education and career planning, the students learn self advocacy; setting short and long term goals, making plans, depersonalizing issues, understanding others' needs and presenting one's strengths. At the culmination of the seminar, each student conducts an informational interview with a high level professional in the career field of the young person's choice. Through these interviews the youth have the chance to practice their self advocacy skills, gain concrete education and career advice and begin to build a network in the community beyond the system.

For more information on the Youth Advocacy Center visit www.youthadvocacycenter.org

Recent Grants:

*Bank of America, \$5,000
Bridges to the Future*

*BNY Mellon, \$50,000
Bridges to the Future*

*FJM Family Fund, \$1,000
General Operating*

*JP Morgan Chase, \$20,000
Bridges to the Future*

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

*The Dammann Fund, \$5,000
Mother/Baby Program*

Never Volunteer

Never volunteer...for anything.

This well known mantra of those in the military only applies if you don't know what you are volunteering to do. If you volunteer for something you know BENEFITS YOU, then go right ahead and put your hand up.

My experience for the past year as a volunteer MENTOR for a 15 year old boy fits that bill perfectly. I was looking for something to keep me busy during my retirement. An organization called CTWOCAT (Change The World One Child At A Time) suggested I had the skills for this kind of work. What were those skills? Simply, the ability to be a role model for a youngster.

I worked with a boy who was at Mercy First. Mercy First houses boys and girls who for one reason or another are not living with their parents or in foster homes. I only regret having waited for retirement to undertake this. I spent only two hours a week with a boy who had no caring adults in his life other than the paid staff at Mercy First.

We started by playing games together. He and I had fun together. Mercy First arranged for us to go, along with other kids, to Nassau Coliseum for a hockey game and CitiField to see a Mets game. We talked, but mostly I listened. I was trained to be non judgmental about what I heard. We built a strong relationship and I looked forward to our visits. Regardless of his mood when I arrived, his face would light up with a smile when he saw me. We learned from each other about many things. I feel I probably got more out of this experience than he did.

MercyFirst Mentor/Volunteer
Jerry K.

*For more information on Volunteer/Mentoring contact;
Cathy Dambrose at 516-921-0808 x 525*

Sanctuary in 2011

As MercyFirst continues to move into the New Year, Sanctuary is alive and well within the Agency. The Sanctuary Model teaches us to embrace change as a catalyst to new growth. Through this growth, we are able to look at where we have been, where we would like to be, and what is the best route for us to get there. We are able to yield different and hopefully more positive results. We are able to promote change in ourselves and in our clients.

The Sanctuary Leadership Team is the group responsible for guiding Sanctuary related growth and change within the Agency. The Team leads the much larger Core Team in developing and implementing Sanctuary Agency-wide in all of our diverse programs. Recently, the Sanctuary Leadership Team has undergone major change as dedicated members have stepped down after years of service and new members have been added. The current members of the leadership team are Gina Cambria, Vice-President of Programs – Foster Boarding Home; Joanne Cordaro, Senior Vice-President of Human Resources; Barbara Denize, Director of Programs – Preventive Services; Christopher Heuer – Training Coordinator; Mary Johnson, Risk Management Specialist; Jacqueline McKelvey, Chief Program Officer; Katrina Miller, Director of Programs – Group Homes; Carolyn O'Brien, Senior Vice-President of Residential Programs; Michele Reichhold, Director of Programs – Preventive; and Deitre Reynolds, Director of Programs – Foster Boarding Home. Thoughtful planning by the Leadership Team will ensure that Sanctuary continues as a means of positive growth and change for our clients and the Agency as a whole.

Recently, two members of the Sanctuary Leadership Team as well as three other staff members had the opportunity to attend the Sanctuary Leadership

(continued on next page)

SPOTLIGHT: Jacqueline McKelvey, New Chief Program Officer

Jacqueline McKelvey, Sr. Vice President of our Foster Boarding Home and Adoption Services, is the new Chief Program Officer at MercyFirst.

“I am delighted that Jackie will be our new Chief Program Officer and have the opportunity to bring her strengths, commitment and knowledge of child welfare services to all the programs of MercyFirst,” said Gerard McCaffery, President/CEO of MercyFirst.

For those of you who do not know, Jackie started as a Caseworker with Angel Guardian after graduating from college. She worked her way up to Supervisor and then Program Director while earning her MSW from Fordham University. Jackie was appointed Associate Executive Director of Angel Guardian in 2002 prior to the merger with St. Mary's. Following the merger in 2003, Jackie was appointed Sr. VP overseeing Foster Boarding Home and Adoption Services in Brooklyn and Queens. Today there are over 500 foster children in our care in regular and therapeutic foster care and last year almost 60 foster children were adopted. Jackie is a member of Senior Staff and played a key role in our re-accreditation with COA and in our recently earning Sanctuary Certification. Along with four other staff, she just completed the 5 day intensive Sanctuary training herself. Jackie has played an important role in carrying out one of the promises of the merger between Angel Guardian and St. Mary's by working with other Management Staff on how best to step-up and step-down adolescents in need of residential treatment services within the agency. In addition, Jackie is a member of COFCCA's Foster Boarding Home Committee that meets with ACS on a regular basis to plan and problem-solve the provision of these services in NYC.

“I have worked my whole career in child welfare and am deeply committed to the development and implementation of best practice strategies,” said McKelvey. “In my new position I will have the opportunity to collaborate with staff across the agency in this very challenging work. I will do my best to help see that all our children and families receive the high quality services they need to ensure safety and achieve permanency in a timely manner.”



GO GREEN!!

YOU CAN NOW RECEIVE THE MERCYLINK IN YOUR INBOX.

PLEASE VISIT www.mercyfirst.org TO SIGN UP FOR OUR “E-MERCYLINK”

MercyFirst Youth Give Back to the Community

Over the past few months, the youth at MercyFirst have been participating in activities that allow them to give back to the community. The youth learned that by working together they can help make an impact in the community and bring joy to others.

- To kick off the holiday spirit, a group of MercyFirst youth teamed up with local Syosset students to volunteer their time to help those in need, they came up with the idea to have a "Peanut Butter and Jelly Day". The youth received donations from generous community members, and local businesses who donated the peanut butter, jelly, bread, bagels, and other food items. The students all worked together to make sandwiches, and pack them in bags with candy and a drink. They were able to make over 75 lunch bags which were then donated to the Mary Brennan INN, a soup kitchen located in Hempstead. MercyFirst Youth Development Coordinator, Cathy Damrose, who organized the project along with Syosset mom Mary Majoy said, "It's a wonderful thing to see young people come together and use their time to do volunteer service. I hope they realize, whether now or in the future, how good it can make you feel to give back to your community and help others in need."



- In December, 16 senior citizens from the Cold Spring Hills Center for Nursing & Rehabilitation, came to the Syosset campus for "Senior Day." Each senior was matched with one of the students from



MercyFirst. The students and the seniors did holiday arts and crafts projects together, shared snacks, and then ended the day with a few rounds of Bingo. The youth worked together to plan the event, to prepare the activities, the agenda and discussed how they would adapt to work with the seniors (ex: speaking loudly and slowly, pushing wheelchairs gently, etc). The event was enjoyed by everyone. After the success of the day at MercyFirst, the youth were all eager to join the Nursing Home Club, which would involve visiting the Cold Spring Hills facility twice a month to do recreational activities and socialize with the seniors.

Save the Date

Monday, May 16, 2011

Spring Golf Outing
Tam O'Shanter Club &
The Creek

Thursday, June 9, 2011

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

Monday, September 19, 2011

MercyFirst Golf Classic
Maidstone Club

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Harvest Ball
Garden City Hotel

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Sanctuary in 2011 *(continued)*

Development Institute Five-Day training at the Andrus Children's Center in Yonkers, New York. This training included both lecture and experiential learning experiences. Lectures by Dr. Sandra Bloom, developer of the Sanctuary Model, included the components of the Sanctuary Model: the seven Sanctuary Commitments, psychobiology and parallel process. Participants were also instructed on specific implementation steps and concrete tools for bringing the Sanctuary Model back to agency sites. In reflecting on her experience, Katrina Miller, Director of Programs – Group Homes and Sanctuary Leadership Team member, said "The five-day Sanctuary Leadership training was a wonderful, life-changing event. It not only showed me ways of being a better social worker, leader and colleague, but a better human being as well. Being trauma-informed is being well prepared for working with children and families on the road to recovery and ultimate healing." Attending this training along with Katrina were Jackie McKelvey, Chief Program Officer, Sanctuary Leadership Team member; Dawn Lewis, Chief Compliance Officer; Janine Halpern, Senior Supervising Nurse; and Jacqueline Vernon, Casework Supervisor – Preventive Services.

- Christopher Heuer, Sanctuary Model Coordinator



Christopher Heuer leads a Sanctuary refresher training for MercyFirst staff.

 **MercyFirst**
a Sisters of Mercy ministry

Syosset Campus
525 Convent Road
Syosset, NY 11791-3864

Brooklyn Campus
6301 Twelfth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11219-5398

www.mercyfirst.org

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR HOLIDAY DONORS

Davis Vision's Annual Holiday Toy Drive.



Moose Legion # 20 donated to the kids at MercyFirst.

"Kids Helping Kids" donated coats and clothing for the children at MercyFirst.



Andrea Clifford and Robin Miller hosted "The Circle" party for 30 local families who sponsored 30 residents.



Salon Redd and friends made the holidays extra special with personalized goodie bags.

INDIVIDUALS

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SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR HOLIDAY DONORS



Mid-Island Collision's Toy Drive.



Seaford High School delivered tons of holiday toys.

The Verizon Pioneers and Mrs. Claus brought holiday cheer to MercyFirst.



"South Woods Cares" collected food for Thanksgiving from South Woods Middle School students and staff.



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 Working on Me Now

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

