



November is National Adoption Month - Meet Jennifer

November is National Adoption Month, a time to raise awareness about the challenges foster care youth face in finding a “forever” home. Meet Jennifer, a MercyFirst success story who found her “forever” home with Mrs. H (a relative) at the age of 10. At the time, because Jennifer’s mother could no longer care for her, Mr. and Mrs. H stepped up and opened up their hearts and home to the young girl, and ultimately adopted her at the age of 15. Today, Mr. and Mrs. H are the proud parents of a confident and smart 16-year-old, who loves to play volleyball with her friends. Finding a forever family, also known as achieving “permanency” through adoption, at Jennifer’s age is rare but she is fortunate to have found a family to provide unconditional love and support.

MercyFirst’s team is helping children like Jennifer every step of the way through the adoption process as they work to find loving families and stable homes where children in foster care can feel safe and have an opportunity to reach their full potential. In 2020, MercyFirst helped eight foster youth find permanent “forever” homes through adoption.



Erin Bivens

Meet Our Art Therapy Interns

Each year, MercyFirst’s Art and Creative Therapies program accepts a new class of Art Therapy interns to work with the youth in our program as they use art to help the children cope with and express traumatic life experiences. We are excited to welcome our newest interns to the MercyFirst community- **Tierra Lindsey** and **Erin Bivens** – both graduate students from the School of Visual Arts in NYC.

When asked about joining MercyFirst, Erin said “I’m so excited to spend my second year of art therapy training as an intern at MercyFirst. I heard about MercyFirst through my professor who shared inspiring stories of past interns transformational work here and ultimately chose MercyFirst because I connect with the agency’s values. I look forward to getting to know the youth and supporting their healing through creativity!”



Tierra Lindsey



Chalkboard Mural from our Art and Creative Therapies Department



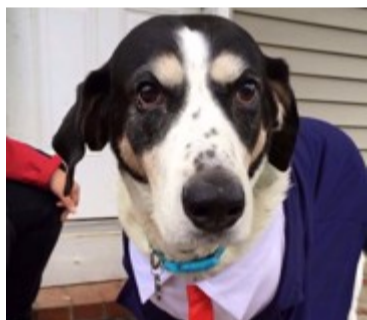
Remembering "Buddy" Koehler

Frederick "Buddy" Koehler (center) was a beloved member of MercyFirst's (formerly St. Mary's) Board of Directors from its incorporation until 2005. He was a very special friend to MercyFirst and served as a major supporter, including during the construction of three campus cottages for which he donated all of the bricks used. In 1985, he was the recipient of our Humanitarian Award for his extraordinary investment of time and energy on behalf of the agency, and his legacy will live on through our "Koehler Cottage" in Syosset, which continues to serve as a home for the children we serve. Our thoughts and prayers are with the entire Koehler family.



Youth Create Mural at Orkestai Farm

Over the past few years, MercyFirst has had a wonderful partnership with [Orkestai Farm](#), located at the Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay. The long-standing collaboration provides youth we serve with therapeutic outdoor trips on a working farm for arts and nature-based interventions as part of trauma informed therapy. Most recently, our youth, in collaboration with a MercyFirst art therapist and art intern, created this colorful community mural for Orkestai Farm's Harvest Moon fundraiser in October.



Therapy Dog Ben

A Tribute to Ben & Mack from Project C.A.R.E.

This month we remember fondly two MercyFirst therapy dogs – Ben and Mack – who dutifully served our youth for nearly 20 years combined. **Ben**, not your traditional therapy dog, was a little grumpy and you had to earn his trust, but he was the dog our youth related to the most and found a niche providing comfort and healing to the kids who connected with him. Ben will always hold the honor of being the first rescue dog to join MercyFirst's Project C.A.R.E. (Canine Academy for Rehabilitation and Education), exemplifying the mutually beneficial relationship between shelter dogs and our youth, where each can help the other heal.



Mack always gave kisses to the youth.

Then there was **Mack**, the textbook version of a therapy dog, a true physical manifestation of love. He was immediately your best friend and made it seem like he had been waiting all day to be pet by you. Our youth valued being able to share affection with these dogs and Mack was definitely the most affectionate, always making the kids feel loved and needed. Ben and Mack will be missed, but we are forever grateful for the impact they made on so many children.

Find out how you can support our children & families this holiday season.

www.mercyfirst.org/holiday

E-mail ksneden@mercyfirst.org or call 516.921.0808 x 1114



Make a Donation Today

ABOUT MERCYFIRST: Rooted in a legacy of mercy spanning more than a century, MercyFirst inspires hope and promotes healing for children and families in need. Founded in 1894 by the Sisters of Mercy, MercyFirst is today one of New York's leading not-for-profit agencies, offering a continuum of care through its network of programs in New York City and on Long Island.