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Annual Spring Golf Outing

On Monday, May 16, 2011, MercyFirst raised over \$170,000 during its Annual Spring Golf Outing held at Tam O'Shanter Club in Brookville, NY and The Creek in Locust Valley, NY. This year over 230 participants from across the country came to spend a day on the greens, while helping to raise funds for children and families served by MercyFirst.



MercyFirst's Youth Speaker with his foster mother and President/CEO Gerard McCaffery.



MercyFirst Board of Trustees Chair, Kevin Shine (left) with friends on the course.

Daniel J. McCarthy, Jr. Scholarship Dinner

MercyFirst held its Annual Daniel J. McCarthy, Jr. Scholarship Dinner at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden on June 9th. This year's event celebrated 20 scholarship recipients from our foster boarding home and group home programs, who are currently enrolled in college or a trade school, pursuing a higher education. Nearly 100 guests honored the students with all that they have accomplished!



MercyFirst Scholarship student and Youth Speaker with two MercyFirst staff members, Mary Bingham-Johnsen and Mecca Phinizy.



MercyLink

connecting the MercyFirst Community

Spring/Summer 2011

Message from the CEO: Lesson Learned

I began my work in this field as a "houseparent" in a group home for teenage boys where I would reside from Sunday to Wednesday doing all the things that any parent does. The work was difficult and challenging; and yet an incredibly rewarding experience. I think I learned more about working with people and managing issues in that job than from getting my MBA!

I remember working with young people who had already been through so much that it was hard to figure out how they could still be positive about their future. It was the first time I learned what it meant to be resilient! And then there were other youth who had a difficult life; and though not nearly as difficult as others, some were overwhelmed and too despondent to take steps needed to improve their situation.

What I learned from this was that you can never tell who will be able to succeed just based on what a person has been through. In this work, you must try to reach each and every youth you work with and never ever give up on any one of them. The relationship you develop with this child or that teen may very well be the one that makes the difference in their life.

Thirty-five years later, I am still amazed at how so many young people, regardless of what they have been through - abuse, rejection, loss, etc. - are able to remain hopeful and persevere to work towards making a better life for themselves. In just about every situation, these youth have been told by the adults that they will never amount to anything. I always wonder where I would be if I grew up in their shoes? How resilient would I be? What lessons would I take from all that life had thrown at me?

As you read this edition of MercyLink, I ask you to think about what you can do to help our youth know that there are people who believe in them. That there are people who want to lend a helping hand that could possibly make the difference for a youth to believe in them self because others believe in them. Be it by serving as a Mentor, or helping us raise funds at an event, or joining us at a Career Day to talk to our youth about your job and what you had to do to get there. What lessons have you learned that they might learn from you?

- Jerry McCaffery, President/CEO

Save the Date

Thursday, November 3, 2011
Harvest Ball
Garden City Hotel

Recent Grants

Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic
\$20,000, Bridges to the Future

Newsday Charities, a fund of the
McCormick Foundation
\$10,000, After-School Program

A Young Mother's Dream

Five girls in MercyFirst's Blended Mother/Child Maternity Program were the lucky recipients of a 'Makeover Day' earlier this spring. Their makeover included a beauty session of hair and makeup as well as a fancy new outfit! Thanks to the organization "A Young Mother's Dream", these teen mothers were able to enjoy a day of being pampered!

A Young Mother's DREAM is a non-profit organization that provides services to young mothers and their children. Some of the services include a mentoring program and workshops that are relative to the issues that our mothers face on a daily basis. Geneva Farrow, is the Executive Director and Founder of A Young Mother's DREAM.

The organization pairs the teens with a mentor who is a former young mother who has gone on to complete her education. Having a role model who has been through a similar experience will give the girls the confidence that they too can succeed and complete their education. It is believed that these mentors can provide the support and understanding that our young mothers need as they face many stigmas on a daily basis. MercyFirst received five slots for mentoring services and awaiting the final matching process.

A Young Mother's DREAM will also be providing monthly independent workshops for the Blended Mother/Child Maternity Program. These workshops will deal with issues related to intimate relationship abuse and violence, improving self-esteem, career development and financial wellness.

Summer Youth Employment and Training Program

MercyFirst Bridges to the Future Program sponsored five MercyFirst youth who participated in the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP) through the Urban League of Long Island. The Urban League of Long Island organizes SYETP, which is a summer academic and career development program. During the six week long program, the youth were exposed to an enriching learning environment that included academic development, career/vocational focus, and exploration/recreational activities.

The youth participated in internships at various sites including State Farm, YMCA, Long Island Housing Authority, Touro College, and Suffolk County Coalition Against Domestic Violence Shelter. Throughout their internships they gained valuable employment experience and job skills. The youth learned how to communicate with others in a professional manner, they learned job responsibility and customer service skills.

Through SYETP, the students received career training from guest speakers who helped with preparing a resume, interviewing skills, and dressing for success. They then had a chance to explore different career fields when they visited the Home Land Security Complex, Suffolk County Police Department and Emergency Services and a restaurant in Sag Harbor. But it wasn't all work, there were trips to Splish Splash and Sag Harbor where the teens got to take a break from all the hard work!

First Annual Adult Day Health Care Adaptive Games held at MercyFirst's Syosset Campus

Cold Spring Hills Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation hosted their first annual Adult Day Health Care (ADHC) Adaptive Games, a variation of the Special Olympics at the Syosset Campus of MercyFirst on Wednesday, July 20th. Students and staff from MercyFirst volunteered at the games and helped the participants with each of the various activities. The participants competed in beach ball volleyball, golf putting, bowling and basketball. There were craft stations where the participants could decorate cookies and paint on their team hats. MercyFirst also provided an area where the participants could visit with MercyFirst's Therapy Dogs. The Therapy Dogs enjoyed all of the attention that they got from their new friends!



MercyFirst therapy dogs visit with the participants.



Photo Credit: Rick Karas



Staff and participants enjoy the craft activities.

Youth Leadership Council Retreat

The MercyFirst Youth Leadership Council is the agency's program wide teen advocacy and leadership group. Throughout the year the Youth Leadership Council meets monthly to discuss current events affecting them in the foster care system, to develop and continue ways to advocate for their rights, and to create new ways of informing their peers. In addition, the leadership council has opportunities to represent MercyFirst in other Leadership Councils on both the city and state level. MercyFirst looks to their Leadership Council to be an example to their peers with their participation in youth development events and their enthusiasm for all advocating opportunities.



Teamwork is a major part of the weekend. Here MercyFirst youth and staff work together to complete an activity.

Earlier this year, the Youth Leadership Council participated in a weekend retreat.

Staff and youth from all three MercyFirst programs traveled to Frost Valley YMCA Camp ground. It would be a weekend to not only celebrate the strong participation and enthusiasm of select MercyFirst youth but also an opportunity for them to build their leadership skills, work together, and have a lot of fun!

The group all stayed together in a large and cozy cabin where views of the grounds and a working wood-burning fireplace brought them together in warmth, laughter, and the smell of toasted marshmallows each night. During the two and a half day retreat YMCA staff brought the group together in a number of activities that tested what they thought would be possible. The daily challenges included activities like: carrying a golf ball balanced on a ring supported by 25 pieces of string out of the cafeteria and placing it the middle of the soccer field without dropping it; making it through a ropes course while holding hands and never hitting the "alarm" bells; and suspending each group member in a harness 3 stories above a forest for a turn on the amazing giant swing.

Each of the leadership activities were designed to enhance communication, challenge the youth, and help them to work together towards their common goal and that they did! The Youth Leadership retreat was a great success and both staff and youth will remember many of the experiences for years to come.

Catherine's Corner

"PASSION, PURPOSE, and PROMISE"

Since the last issue of the "MercyLink," the Sisters of Mercy of the Mid-Atlantic Community, the sponsors of MercyFirst, have participated in a process of discernment regarding Leadership, Mission, and Ministry. Our conversations, prayer, and decision making were situated within our theme of Passion, Purpose, and Promise.

We stepped back to take a look forward at God's Dream for our world and how Catherine McAuley and the women and men who have gone before us lived out and accomplished only a tiny fraction of God's work.

Today and together, we need to ask the same questions in order to carry out "our work" to make a difference in the lives of our youth, children and families.

Do we LIVE with Passion? Do we ACT with Purpose? Do we KEEP our Promises?

*"This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We begin programs and services that will need further development.
No program accomplishes our mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything."*

(edited from a talk by Oscar Romero)

Today, WE live out and accomplish God's work – by the efforts and good work of our Administration, Board Members, Co-workers, and our generous Benefactors. Our efforts may be incomplete but we are able to do something, and to do it very well.

M. Seton Agovino, VP of Mission Integration



The group works together during the weekend activities.