



MERCY MATTERS



Gina with her family
at Family Spirit Day

Photo by Andrew Cottet



Janice with Renalta and Patrice

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hope has always had a special place at Mercy Home. During challenging times, with hope, we can always find a silver lining, no matter the odds. Last year, like many agencies, we had to do more with a limited budget. Thanks to you and your support, we faced each obstacle head on. Organizationally, we restructured while re-envisioning our path forward.

In accordance with New York State, we were able to successfully phase out our Medicaid Service Coordination services to participate in People First Care Coordination, which seeks to improve services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We created new partnerships with organizations and companies committed to serving their community like the William and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation to create a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction workshop for parents and caregivers. Additionally, we were able to introduce Community Habilitation for people living in the community which encourages independence through activities such as independent living and learning to make informed choices.

We expanded our Creative Arts Therapy program as well as our urban farming program, Plant-Grow-Give, in which residents plant, grow, and donate fresh produce to shelters and food pantries around the city. Last harvest, they donated over 1,000 lbs of fresh fruit and vegetables to veteran and homeless shelters.

This year, we will forge on in the spirit and the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy and with the help and partnership of all our supporters, and in league with our staff, elevate our innovative programs, and continue to promote life skills, lifelong.

Janice Aris

Janice Aris
Executive Director

GRACE'S BOYS: EVAN & ZACH



1 in 59 children in the United States have autism, a lifelong developmental disorder that affects communication and behavior. Please take a minute to meet Grace, whose sons Evan and Zachery have participated in Mercy Home's Creative Arts and Music Therapy programs since 2006.

Eighteen years ago, Grace and Cosimo were thrilled to discover that they would be parents of triplets. Three tiny sons – Frank Junior (Frankie), Evan, and Zachery – were born eight weeks early, the largest weighing no more than four pounds and the smallest around three.

Because they were premature and multiples, the medical team at Cornell Hospital, where Grace gave birth through an emergency C-section, watched them closely. Evan was slower to breathe on his own than his brothers. He and Zachery took longer to feed. By contrast, Frankie progressed typically, reaching infant milestones of feeding, talking, and walking per medical guidelines. When the boys were 13 months old, Grace knew that Evan and Zach would be atypical babies.

"It's clear they were lagging," Grace recalls. "Even by premie standards, they weren't hitting the benchmarks like they should have."

The diagnosis: Evan and Zach both had autism. Evan didn't speak until age 7 and, when he did, he suffered from poor articulation because his vocal muscles were weak. Zach had no problem talking, but he exhibited a classic symptom of repeating words and phrases known as echolalia.

Grace was determined that Evan and Zach would learn how to read and write and enjoy art, music, sports, and holiday parties. She also wanted to make sure that Frankie had his social and academic needs met. It was a delicate balance, a daily struggle between the lives she wanted her sons to lead, and the reality of raising two children with autism.

When her boys were six, Grace saw a flyer for a new weekly Respite and Creative Arts Therapy program offered by Mercy Home. Evan and Zach were selected to join and they look forward to returning each year. Mercy Home's Saturday classes are a safe, creative, and loving environment where individual strengths and challenges are celebrated. Each week, in small class sizes and guided by licensed therapists, they participate in art, music, drama and now yoga therapy. Because of your past support, Grace and the rest of her family, were able to rest on Saturday afternoons. They took Frankie to chess club or just relaxed with other parents

over a cup of coffee. The program offered Grace another gift, perhaps the most important of them all: to see her sons Evan and Zach for who they are.

"One day I just said 'enough,'" recalls Grace. "They are autistic, they will always be autistic. But they're also great guys. They're kind, loving, wonderful, and affectionate. They want to go out, to do things, to learn things.

Mercy Home helped me to actually look at them. They aren't a project or something to fix. They are my boys."

Grace's resolution to provide an active life for her boys reflects Mercy Home's dedication to help men and women with intellectual and developmental disabilities reach their God-given potential.

"But the reality of autism is that it doesn't go away," Grace said. "I realized that their best chance was to make them independent, to eat at the table, clear up their dishes, dress themselves: the fundamental things you'd expect from any child."

Frankie, is currently an engineering major at New York University. The three brothers are incredibly close-knit and shared the same bedroom for years. Frankie will most likely move out of the family home when he graduates, but Grace knows that Evan and Zach aren't able to live on their own – and for now, she's not ready for them to leave the nest.

"When I'm ready to start looking over their options, my hope is that there will be a place for them – together – at Mercy Home," says Grace. "They are so loving to my boys. The options are fewer as they get older, and as long as they are living at home, I hope they will be in the Creative Arts program, either in the children or the adult program."

At Mercy Home, #ABILITYOVERDISABILITY isn't a hashtag, but a way of life. Thanks to your partnership, Mercy Home has been able to expand services for more children with autism and their families.

Independence, creativity, communication, and community are encouraged, and for Evan and Zach, their brother Frankie, and parents Grace and Cosimo, Mercy Home's weekly Respite arts program has been nothing short of a miracle. Thanks to your continued support, we are able help even more children like Evan and Zach grow and prosper. The program takes place every Saturday in September through June. To complete an application or support the program, please visit our website.

REUNITING RICKY!



Enrique, also known to staff, family, and friends as Ricky, has been a resident of Mercy Home since approximately the age of 7. While he was growing up at one of Mercy Home's residences, Ricky's father and his sister, Arlet, were his main sources of love and support. However, as his father grew older and was unable to travel and to visit regularly, Arlet picked up the responsibility in caring for Ricky's needs, including buying clothing and other resources to make sure he was comfortable.

After their father passed, Arlet became the closest person to Ricky, especially during the past 10 years in which Ricky was experiencing great discomfort due to significant medical issues. Ricky is non-verbal and was unable to express himself during this challenging period. Mercy Home needed to put extra resources towards his care and his sister was by his side, visiting him regularly and always involved with his care and treatment.

Nearly three years ago, Arlet moved to Houston, Texas for job opportunities. Since then, she has not been able to see her brother due to high travel and boarding costs. But Arlet is determined to reunite with her brother Ricky.

"I believe this is something my brother would want and will greatly benefit from, and I feel that it is important for him to know that I am still a part of his life," said Arlet.

Having been by his side and seeing him through some demanding periods in his life, Arlet would now like to give Ricky something familiar by spending quality face to face time with her brother.

"The residence does a great job with communication over the phone, mail, and even facetime," said Arlet, "but that could never replace the opportunity to be able to hug and see each other in person."

If you would like to help Arlet reunite with her brother, here are some of the ways you can help bring them together.

- Donate points or miles
- Send a donation to Mercy Home
- Donate AirBnB or hotel voucher

To Reunite Ricky, please contact info@mercyhomeny.org.

A TREE GROWS AT MERCY HOME



A Tree Grows in Mercy Home showcased two of our talented gifted artists, DJ & James. They worked with Brooklyn based artists Laura Cuille and Juliana Trujillo in Community Vision emPowered supported by the Brooklyn Arts Council.

Together they created works of art that celebrated the contributions of artists with developmental disabilities to conceptualize each piece.

During Laura's first meeting with DJ, DJ carefully sketched leaves and continued to do so for three months. Laura was then inspired to create a multi-media project that evolved into a large-scale tree installation that was displayed in Mercy Home's historic chapel. James is best known for painting and drawing colorful works of art, but Juliana noticed his interest in the iPad and they began sketching and outlining photos. Then they incorporated braille into a t-shirt design, which was worn by Melodic Soul during their December performance.

Art has a language of its own, and Community Vision emPowered allowed us to invite artists from the community to get to know the people we serve. If you're interested in learning more about the Gifted Artists program, please email us at info@mercyhomeny.org.





BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO MERCY

Statistics report that parents of children and adults living with developmental disabilities often experience higher levels of distress than other parents. Mercy Home has recognized the importance of managing stress and we are excited about our recent partnership with the William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation to help bring a new mindfulness and stress reduction program to Mercy Home.

"The William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation recently re-affirmed the Foundation's long-standing commitment to strengthen families, and refined our grantmaking focus to include three areas – one which is to improve the health and well-being of the families in the communities we call home," said Leslie Perkul, the Foundation's President and CEO. "We're excited about this opportunity to help Mercy Home test the efficacy of mindfulness training for the adults at the same time their children are engaged in meaningful activities."

Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) programs are designed to help parents and caregivers of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities manage stress, teach them methods of self-care, and provide them resources and a network for supportive relationships.

"These techniques will be an extra tool in their utility belt, says Director of Support Programs Miguel Torres Castro. "It will help bring ease to these parents and create a new sense of patience and their ability to cope and manage stress."

As many of our parents and caregivers spend the day at Mercy Home waiting to take their kids home from the program, they will now have the option to use their time to learn about coping methods which include yoga, stress management, meditation, and breathing techniques. One yoga instructor, who works with families to reduce stress, recalls the positive feedback from her workshops. "One participant told me they always feel much more relaxed towards the end of our yoga practice."

Foundations such as the William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation, work collaboratively with nonprofit organizations to improve the life for families and create strong communities where families can thrive.

"With this new funding, Mercy Home will be able to provide support to parents and caregivers and give them an opportunity to rejuvenate," said Janice Aris, Executive Director. "It serves as a gateway to create awareness and invite the community to Mercy Home."

The workshop is open to families outside of Mercy Home. Select attendees will also have the opportunity to be trained in teaching other parents mindfulness and stress reducing methods.

To learn more or if you are interested in joining the program, please contact Miguel Torres Castro at mtcastro@mercyhomeny.org.

YOU'RE A BLESSING!

The generosity of our Leadership Circle* donors enables Mercy Home the opportunity to continue providing innovative programs like Plant-Grow-Give - a horticultural therapy program; Creative Arts Therapy program - an art, music, and drama therapy as well as other activities and projects that will assist in the development of lifelong skills.

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*Leadership circle donors provide a minimum donation of \$1,000. We strive to be as inclusive as possible and we apologize in advance for any omission.

SPECIAL MERCY MOMENTS

We love getting inspirational stories from our supporters and would like to celebrate these wonderful acts of kindness and compassion.

★ After overhearing some Mercy Home staff discuss some difficulties they had in caring for one of our residents' pet goldfish, Patrick, one of our dedicated Behavior Mentors, paid the staff a surprise visit at the resident's home. He came armed with various remedies, cleaning supplies, and advice to help them learn how to take care of the fish.

★ One of our youngest donors, at age 9, was moved by an article written in our previous newsletter, after reading, he encouraged his family to read it and saved up his allowance to donate to Mercy Home.

Thank you for all of your support!

MERCY HOME HAPPENINGS



Princess Chambers



JP Morgan Volunteer Day



Melodic Soul



Family Spirit Day



2019 MLK Day of Service

AN EVENING AT THE LAKE FUNDRAISING DINNER

Mercy Home hosted “An Evening at the Lake” fundraising dinner last spring raising much-needed funds for Mercy Home and our organic urban farming program, Plant-Grow-Give. It was a magical night at the Prospect Park Boathouse and we were blessed to be joined by so many friends to celebrate and honor Richard Warren for his work to support Mercy Home and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

It couldn't have happened without the support and dedication of our leading supporters, **Warren and Warren PC, Lamb Insurance, Donna and Bob Whiteford, Casey Mckee, Fran Picone, Central Business Systems, Community Care Rx, Flag Waterproofing and Restoration and Lisa Goldstein and Peter Nosal.** Catering was provided by Bon Soir Catering Company.

Join us on June 6, 2019 to honor Lamb Insurance and Father Michael Perry at our 2019 spring fundraising dinner.

Questions? Email info@mercyhomeny.org.



BEER, BOURBON & BITES

Beer & Bites was back with a bourbon twist to raise money for our Creative Arts Therapy program, which provides vital music, drama, and art therapy to allow children with autism to become innovators of their expression.

We transformed our space into an indoor beer garden with unlimited samplings of beer from **Brooklyn Tap House, Captain Lawrence Brewing Co., Coney Island Brewing Company, Hofbrau Bierhaus, SixPoint Brewing Co,** and **Lagunitas Brewing Co.**

Also featured were female produced wines from **Corkscrew Wines**, and delicious Bourbon from **Woodford Reserve**, as well Noble Oak, Old Forester, and Hudson Whiskey Baby Bourbon from **Empire Merchant**. There was also tasty bite-sized foods and desserts from local eateries including, **Taqueria Tepango, Brooklyn Tap House, Margaret Palca Bakes, Da Ciro, Lessen & Hennings, Dannee Thai, Sapphire Indian Cuisine**, as well as coffee from our neighbor **BKG Coffee Roasters**.



SAVE THE DATE

APRIL 27, 2019

MERCY HOME BAR CRAWL

This spring, we're looking forward to toasting warmer weather with Mercy Home's first ever fundraising Bar Crawl event in Manhattan. If you would like to join us or help sponsor the event, please contact sjean@mercyhomeny.org.

JUNE 6, 2019

SPRING FUNDRAISER

We excited to once again celebrate Plant-Grow-Give at our annual Spring Fundraiser at the Prospect Park Picnic House in June. If you would like donate or help sponsor the event, please contact hstewart@mercyhomeny.org.

JULY 2019

BROOKLYN CYCLONES FUNDRAISER

Nothing says summer like baseball and this summer 2019, Mercy Home will hold a fundraiser at a Brooklyn Cyclones game at MCU Park in Coney Island. If you'd like to attend, please contact info@mercyhomeny.org.

OUR BOARD HAS GROWN!

Join us in welcoming, Kerin Coughlin, Ricky Jain, and Vincent Siasoco, MD to our board. Each new member brings a wealth of experience in their fields and a passion for helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities lead full and meaningful lives.

**TO MAKE A DONATION, PLEASE
RETURN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE
OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
MERCYHOMENY.ORG.**

WAYS TO SUPPORT

DONATE

Mercy Home is able to support our amazing programs and services through the donations of friends and supporters like you. Contributions help improve the quality of life for our residents. You can support Creative Arts Therapy, Plant-Grow-Give, Melodic Soul, or our Gifted Artists Programs in a variety of ways. If you would like to become a donor, please contact Helen Stewart, Director of Development at hstewart@mercyhomeny.org or via phone at 718.832.1075 x 121.

DONATION OF STOCK SECURITIES

Appreciated stock gifts can reduce your tax liability while providing flexible funding for our programs. Please contact us for details on how to make a gift of stock or securities.

WORKPLACE GIVING

Double the impact of your gift through your employer's matching gifts program. If you have any questions, please contact us at info@mercyhomeny.org.

JOIN THE LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

With a contribution of \$1,000 or more per year you'll immediately become a member of the Leadership Circle and will receive exclusive invitations to special events and receive the latest information and materials.

PLANNED GIVING

A charitable bequest is a wonderful way to leave a lasting legacy that benefits children, youth, and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities. You may name Mercy Home for Children in your will, including our tax identification number (11-1666227), leaving either cash or securities.

A planned gift can also significantly reduce taxes, but it is best to discuss these benefits with your financial advisor.