

Mercy Moments

A Publication of Mercy Center Bronx, NY



Looking back... and looking forward!

Greetings!

As we look forward to the new year ahead, we also look back in gratitude for the past year, highlighted by events that celebrated our 20th Anniversary.

Our anniversary celebrations culminated with an Anniversary Dinner at the NY Botanical Garden in November, as we honored our founders: Mary Ann Durr, RSM, Maria Mercado, Alba Torres, and Mary Galeone, RSM.



Board Member Peggy Costa making a presentation at the Anniversary Dinner

Over 360 participants, supporters and volunteers enjoyed a wonderful evening as speakers told of the rich history of Mercy Center, and participants shared their stories of the impact Mercy Center has had on their lives. Many thanks to our co-chairs Pat Marino and Francesca Romanos and their hard-working committee.

As the celebration of our 20th Anniversary comes to a close, we are once again filled with awe and gratitude for the participation of so many in accomplishing so much here at Mercy Center. We renew our commitment to continue our important work as we confidently embrace the next 20 years, and beyond.

Participants will learn to speak English, parents will work to improve communication skills and strengthen family life and values, women will learn basic computer skills and enhance employability, children will improve reading and enroll in better schools.

Our work would not be possible without the participation of many volunteers, supporters, and partner organizations. We invite you to read more about some of them in this newsletter.

Many thanks for being a part of the Circle of Mercy, a place of opportunity and empowerment where women and families move beyond surviving to truly thriving.

Joe Durr, Co-Director

Mary Galeone, RSM, Co-Director

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Working with Partners...Accomplishing More

Mercy Center works with various partners so that the children of Mercy Center participants have access to an array of programs and services we could never provide by ourselves. With Mercy Center here on 145th Street, our children's lives have been enriched in many ways:

House of the Roses



House of the Roses is a volunteer dance company that works with shelter-based and inner city youth to give them opportunities to discover interests and talents in dance and expressive movement. They have been working with Mercy Center children since 2005. Every year the children are given the opportunity to grace the Times Square and Columbia University stages. It was through House of the Roses that we were discovered by Antonio Banderas and eventually R.Evolución Latina.

Dancing with House of the Roses

R.Evolución Latina

R.Evolución Latina was founded by Luis Salgado, a star performer and choreographer in *"In the Heights"* on Broadway, to bring together Latino stars to work with inner city children to help them *Dare to Go Beyond*. In working closely with Mercy Center, our children have been trained in dance, song, and acting with Broadway performers in Broadway studios, and at performing arts camps here at Mercy Center. The children rehearsed and danced to an *"In the Heights"* scene with Antonio Banderas, who stressed to them the importance of "daring to go beyond."

Fiver Foundation

Founded in 2001 by a retired Wall Street executive, Fiver Foundation offers a two week summer camp experience in upstate New York to over 500 children every year – and over 80 of them are Mercy Center children! Youth are accepted for this honor when they are 8 or 9 years old and are then invited back for 10 years for a long-term immersion in a Whole Self curriculum that fosters values such as loyalty, friendship, care for the environment, and leadership. Fiver is also a year-round program that reaches out to the campers through their schools and community programs, creating relationships with the child's school principal, school counselors, and the family's case worker. Fiver was recently chosen by Social Impact Research (SIR), an independent research department of Root Cause, as 1 of 7 high-performing college access and success organizations in New York City.

Planned Giving to Support Mercy Center

Please consider providing continued support to the women and families of Mercy Center through mentioning Mercy Center in your estate plans. For more information, contact Margo Golos at MGolos@MercyCenterBronx.org.

Heading to the Super Bowl!

Congratulations to Pam and Mike Chapman who won our raffle of two tickets to the Super Bowl, and to Debbra Stolarik who sold the winning ticket.

Did you know?

- Over 2,000 women, men and children benefited from our services last year.
- Mercy Center counts on the help of over 200 volunteers each year who make our programs possible.
- It costs over \$5,500 for Mercy Center to open its doors each day.
- While the official poverty figure for a family of four is \$20,000, almost 2/3 of our participants survive on annual household incomes of less than \$15,000.

Our New Year's Resolutions

Our Program Coordinators have great plans for their programs in the coming year and share their resolutions:

- **Family Development/Family Alternatives to Violence**

Our women see the need for their family life to be strengthened by helping the men in their families learn how to build strong family relationships. We hope to increase the participation of men in the program, including laying the groundwork for a men's support group. ~ Lucy

- **Employment/Job Skills**

We'd like to see a significant increase in the number of women who get well-paying, sustainable jobs this year. Every new job gives another family the chance to move out of desperate poverty, and a chance to thrive. ~ Carmen

- **English as a Second Language/Immigrant Services**

Each year we see higher percentages of our students who begin classes graduate at the end of the 10 month program. In 2011 we hope this number will be even higher, as the result of working with instructors to encourage consistent attendance. ~ Judith

- **Youth Programs**

One goal is to increase the participation of young men in our programs, giving them a safe haven in contrast to the violence on our streets. Girl's Movie Night has been such a success, the teen boys have been asking for a Movie Night of their own, and we'd like to make this happen. ~ Mary Ellen

Volunteer Spotlight: Malina... and Bowser and Kiwuli, too!



Malina, with Bowser and Kiwuli

Malina Mannarino might say that volunteering at Mercy Center has *gone to the dogs*...Bowser and Kiwuli, to be precise! They are Malina's certified therapy dogs, and they've been volunteering along with Malina since 2006.

Malina knew the success of using therapy dogs to help kids in reading programs by creating a comfortable and supportive environment, allowing them to come out of their shells, become more expressive, and develop their reading skills.

Malina realized that once kids outgrew the Saturday Reading Enrichment Program, which is geared for grades K-5, they had nowhere to go. So she worked with Mercy Center staff to launch a Reading Club for the older kids in grades 6-8.

The Reading Club reads books together, each taking turns reading aloud. They also read on their own, and love reading to Bowser, with him perched on their laps. Bowser has become their "mascot" and they treat him as they've learned to treat each other – with care, support, and respect.



Malina loves making stories come alive for the kids, and believes "there's no such thing as a boring book!" The Club has also delved into poetry, journaling, art projects, and discussing world news. The Reading Club also helps tutor the younger children in the Saturday reading program. Needless to say, the younger kids look forward to 'graduating' to the Reading Club, when they'll have the chance to enjoy reading with Malina... and Bowser and Kiwuli!

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Save the Date!

Mercy Center's 7th Annual Cocktail Reception and Auction

Date: Wednesday, April 13, 2011

Location: The Boathouse in Central Park, NYC

Diane Veza, Chairperson

For more information contact Emily Usher Shrair
(347) 590-0481 or eus@mercycenterbronx.org

