

Mercy Matters

As we enter the second half of 2020 and the start of our new fiscal year, there is one defining word that comes to the forefront of my mind. Resilience. The resiliency I have witnessed around the world but especially here within Mercy Home over the past few months has been nothing short of astounding.

From March to June, many of us had to pause our lives due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. As New Yorkers, living in the epicenter of the pandemic, we experienced a sudden and rapid shift into new norms. For the first time ever, the stores were closed, no one was walking around, and there were limited subway and bus options. We were required to wear masks and face coverings when going outside, we waited on lines to enter supermarkets and pharmacies -- all while maintaining the mandatory six feet social distancing guidelines. And for the first time in recent memory, all social and large gatherings were forbidden. This meant no programs or activities for residents, no joyful weddings, no loved filled funerals, and for our youth, their rite of passage to proms and graduations were cancelled. These were the sacrifices we made, all to stop the spread of the virus and prevent further loss of life.

There is no question about it. It has been tough, and it has been especially tough on the developmental disability community and our essential workers. During the height of the pandemic, group homes were not recognized with the same urgency or funding as hospital and nursing homes. This made procuring protective equipment like face shields, masks, gowns, and shoe covers difficult to access, as there was already a national shortage.

It was with the resiliency of our staff who came to work, day in and day out, putting their safety at risk in order to provide that safety for the men and women we care for. It was the determination and love from supporters like you, who donated thousands of PPE including face



masks and face coverings, gloves, shoe covers, and gowns as well as cleaning supplies and came together to send over breakfast, lunch, and dinners to our staff and residents. Thanks to your support, our May 5th Zoom-A-Thon raised almost \$30,000 to support our staff including providing hazard pay and support for staff caring for our residents who tested positive for the coronavirus.

As you will read from firsthand accounts, it has been a difficult and trying journey for staff, families, and our residents alike. We had to say goodbye to three of our amazing, bright spirited residents who had fallen ill due to the coronavirus.

As we move forward through 2020, we thank you for all the support we have received during one of the most difficult periods in our organization's history. Every dollar you sent counts in supporting Mercy Home, our dedicated staff, and in continuing to keep our residents safe as the threat of a second wave and future uncertainty looms. You can visit mercyhomeny.org to continue keeping those we care for safe.

Janice Aris

Janice Aris, Executive Director

Donica's Story: A Mother's Search for Answers

All too common during the coronavirus pandemic, we've heard many stories of the challenges parents and caregivers faced during the lockdown. With statewide school closures put in place on March 16, 2020, families had to quickly adapt to a new normal that has never been seen before in modern history.

In addition to the closure of schools and after school programs, and uncertain reopening in the fall of 2020, most summer and sleep away camps in NYC were suspended in order to protect the children. This has provided a financial, emotional and psychological strain on families and caregivers who often rely on these programs as they go to work and need a respite.

"It's been extremely challenging," said Donica, mother of 12-year old Dorian, a participant in Mercy Home's Creative Art Therapy program.

Mercy Home's Creative Arts Therapy program provides 100 children and teens living with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities with essential art, music, drama, dance and yoga therapy, as well as an outlet for parents and caregivers to communicate with one another and share in comradery the joys and challenges of caring for a loved one with special needs.

Guardians even have the option to attend Mercy Home's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction workshops, which provides the opportunity to learn helpful tips and tools to alleviate stress and develop their mindfulness, while practicing deep breathing and presence awareness. However, as the pandemic intensified across the globe and in New York State, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, enacted the New York State on PAUSE stay home order, effectively ceasing all non-essential business operations and in-person gatherings.

Although Mercy Home is considered an essential service, the gathering of over 100 youths and adults for our Saturday programming was no longer a safe option and Mercy Home was forced to move our programming to be accessed remotely.

"First it was school, then it was the hands-on art therapy programs. It was like at every interval of the pandemic, all the resources we had available to my son have been significantly limited," said Donica.

Trying to make sense of the sudden but necessary changes for both herself and her son, they both had to adjust to their new reality. But it came with its challenges. As an essential worker herself, Donica works an overnight shift until 7 AM. At the height of the pandemic, Donica would get home, have only a quick moments rest, then assist Dorian with his virtual learning, where for the next few hours, she helped him stay focused on his lessons.

"It's disheartening because it's been hard for him. Kids with autism need routine and structure," said Donica. "[Remote learning] had not been stimulating for him and it feels like independent study."

In between assignments, Donica had to work overtime in keeping her son engaged and on track all while doing everyday chores and errands. According to Dr. Jeffrey Sealy, Mercy Home's Director of Psychological Services, what Donica is experiencing is something common amongst many families with children with special needs.



"Caring for a child diagnosed with developmental disabilities can be challenging to any parent especially due to the constraints of the pandemic," says Dr. Sealy. "With so many other responsibilities such as work duties, family responsibilities and maintaining peace of mind, it can become an arduous process. However, it is important that each parent experiencing these issues take advantage of their circle of support."

Fortunately, Donica had the support of her mother, who also lives with her and was there to help care for Dorian when Donica tested positive with COVID-19.

She was out of work for nearly one and a half months, during which she had to self-quarantine away from her family which, like many, she describes as a very "isolating" experience. However, once Donica was able to defeat the virus and get back on her feet, things did not get much easier.

Nearly six months since the first cases of COVID-19 in NYC, an already difficult situation had begun to deteriorate even further. Despite their efforts in trying to help him stay engaged and active, Dorian has grown increasingly restless and bored. Not being able to interact with his peers or attend the weekly programs he loves has taken its toll as Dorian is starting to ask more questions about when things will go back to normal.

"It's hard for children but it's even harder for kids with developmental disabilities to understand what is going on," says Donica. "He wants to be able to go to school and to his Saturday program and you can see there's starting to be a breakdown of why this is all happening. The worst thing you can do as a parent is not have the answers."

Answers are hard to come by. With an uncertain timeframe for the development of a vaccine, a rise in confirmed cases worldwide, and an indefinite timeline for reopening of schools and programs, resuming in-person programs such as our weekend Creative Arts Therapy, are still unknown.

"We miss being at Mercy Home. What we miss most about Mercy Home is that there was an outlet and he was able to interact with his peers. He also misses doing fun in-person horticultural therapy activities with Maggie, Mercy Home's horticultural therapist."

No one knows when things will get back to "normal" or what the new normal will look like. But in the meantime, all we can do, is hope for the best.

Now more than ever, we can use your help to continue providing essential creative arts therapy to the youth and families we support.

Visit our website at mercyhomeny.org to donate.

Clipping the Wings of Social Butterfly

As Published June 20, 2020

"I'm bored!"

That has become somewhat of a standard response exclaimed by Oliver* when you ask him how he's doing. For nearly three months now, Oliver, one of Mercy Home's residents, like most of us, has been self-quarantined at home due to the novel coronavirus pandemic which has hit the New York City region especially hard.

Nonetheless, Mercy Home's essential and heroic frontline workers have worked tirelessly in trying to keep residents safe, active and engaged. Oliver admits, things haven't been all bad. With the help of Mercy Home supporters, his residence received more games, such as his favorite game, Bingo as well as entertainment devices, which allows him to watch his favorite classic musicals on streaming devices and DVDs.

He also admits he's had more time to spend with his housemates and he has been communicating with family; chatting about the things they have in common and envisioning a life of normalcy after the virus. Oliver is looking forward to getting out and about and seeing his beloved NY Yankees.

"We gonna see a [baseball] game and then we're going to go to Junior's and I'm going to order a burger deluxe and chocolate cake." As he shares the plans he's making with his cousin.

With the global health crisis and new stagnant lifestyle, Mercy Home staff have been creative in keeping residents active, conducting socially distant home exercise session, and preparing hearty, healthy home cooked meals, which for a self-professed junk foodie like Oliver has been noticeable.

"Health wise, he's doing excellent," says his residence manager. "With the home cooked meals staff and our guys have worked together in preparing, we've noticed he's been doing great."

Life has been particularly challenging for the intellectual and developmental disabilities community, as recent reports have shown that men and women with developmental disabilities were more likely to test positive for the coronavirus and have amongst the most fatalities of any population.

With New York State's Stay-at-Home order put in place in mid-March 2020, the state called for the suspension of all non-essential business and activities as the city grappled with this severe and growing global crisis. The order, though necessary to flatten the curve and prevent the spread of the virus, has resulted in the indefinite suspension of Day Habilitation programs across the region. Day Habilitation programs, which typically operate Mondays through Fridays, offer a wide selection of supportive therapy, structured activities and allows residents to work with trained coordinators in order to build a sense of autonomy and develop the skills they need to live independently in their homes and communities.



However, even for one of our most autonomous residents like Oliver, coming to a full understanding of the severe health crisis facing the country still comes with its limitations.

"I want to go back to program, says Oliver. "I'm sick of COVID-19. I want to start going back out and I want to go to the stores and see my neighbors again because I haven't been able to see them in a very long time."

As local small businesses have also been deeply affected by the pandemic, they have largely remained closed as the city has dealt with the health crisis until they are given the greenlight to reopen again. But for a social butterfly like Oliver, the closures of these local businesses and restaurants means not being able to interact with the owners and employees, who he considers like friends, as he previously had done on a weekly basis for nearly a decade and a half.

For Oliver, it is the relationships that he misses most. "I miss getting free pizza but I miss the owner just as much as I miss the pizza," he says.

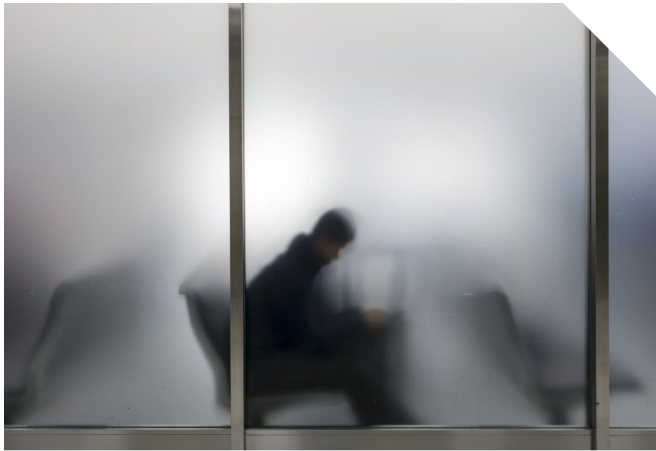
The one thing that is certain these days is that there's still a long, uncertain road ahead. But Oliver agrees everyone the sooner everyone, including him does their part in stopping the spread, the sooner we can get back to some sense of normalcy. "We've been doing a good job here at home like washing our hands. We're gonna beat the virus!"

**Names have been changed for privacy.*

****While New York has entered Phase 4, under the guidance of the Office of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, our residents are still only able to gather in small groups, restricted to housemates, roommates, and staff, and are allowed to leave their home only for limited and low risk community outings or brief outdoor activities.**

The Waiting Game

As Published June 20, 2020



Patrick* had been running a fever for two weeks but it wasn't until Laura*, a residence manager, went to bring him an apple to snack on, that she noticed something was not right. Patrick's doctors had prescribed him over the counter medication to help him break his fever, but it only helped in managing it.

It was not until a fateful Tuesday afternoon, that Laura saw there was truly something wrong as she handed Patrick his snack and noticed his eyelids had become so puffy, they were obstructing his ability to see.

It was then, the tumultuous journey to get Patrick medical attention began. Following the directions provided to her, Laura along with Jaina*, the direct support professional that works with Patrick, took him to the nearest urgent care but was turned away because they did not accept their insurance.

Thinking quickly, Jaina was able to find and bring Patrick to the nearest urgent care that did accept their insurance. But the news wasn't good. In addition to the fever he had been unable to shake, Patrick's oxygen levels were low, and he seemed to be exhibiting symptoms of the novel coronavirus.

An ambulance was called and rushed to take Patrick to the emergency room. However, despite Jaina's insistence, for safety precautions, he had to go alone. "She told me they wouldn't let her go with them, which I could understand for

safety reasons," said Laura. "But we were prepared. We had an emergency COVID-19 Packet that we gave to the EMTs so they had all of Patrick's medical and my contact information."

It was then the waiting game. Nearly a day and a half later, they still had not been contacted from the hospital. Laura spent her day calling the hospital after hospital trying to find Patrick to no avail. Then she was contacted by NY's Emergency Medical Service hotline, which tracks every ambulance pick up and hospital admission, "Once I received that call, my eyes just filled with tears," Laura said, "They were tears of sadness and tears of joy. Sadness that he was in there, but a joy that we had found him at last."

Patrick's condition had declined. Due to his symptoms, he was admitted to the COVID unit of the hospital – being placed on a ventilator, and doctors have started him on antibiotics.

"The doctor who is on Patrick's case is amazing! He is the true meaning of compassion. But being in that unit, it's very difficult to get updates but I keep trying."

Things in the residences have also been difficult. With one individual testing positive with the coronavirus, Laura and her staff, also must maintain a close eye on both residents and staff alike.

"Everyone is in quarantine. But the tension and anxiety levels are so high right now," she said. "When you hear someone cough, everyone gets just a little nervous."

However, with all that is going on, Laura remains hopeful. Giving praise to her staff and all they've done including working double shifts to covering for sick colleagues, and not shying away from potentially exposed residents, Laura finds ways to try to keep everyone's spirits lifted such as hosting a small, socially distance BBQ for staff and individuals in the enclosed backyard of their residence.

But Laura understands, they are not in clear just yet.

**Names have been changed for privacy.*

***UPDATE: After nearly 2 months of intensive treatment and care, sadly, Patrick lost his battle with COVID-19 and passed away in May 2020. He is missed by his family and friends, but we will keep him forever in our memories.

***"Those we love don't go away, they walk beside us every day.
Unseen, unheard, but always near, so loved, so missed, so very dear."***

-Unknown

You're a blessing!

The generosity of the Mercy Home community during the last few months has been nothing short of astounding. Your donations has meant a lot of us and our dedicated staff members who have been working around the clock to keep our residents safe and protected during these unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 virus. Your unwavering support during our most challenging times, helps us find new and creative ways to keep our staff and residents safe, and the children, women and men along with the families we support engaged as we cautiously resume our supportive programming. Thank you for your support!

Anonymous
Anonymous
The Accordino Family
Raymond Ally
Edward & Maysa Antonio
Paula Antonio
Brian Archer
Kathleen and Jack Best
Pauline Blake
Patricia Bond
Brooklyn Arts Council
John & Kathleen Brophy
Bernadine Cadogan
Catholic Cemeteries
Larry Celona
Central Business Systems
Jay & Sunny Chi
Louis and Lucille Chiacchere
Salvatore Chiacchere
Joanne Colella
Francis X. Comerford
Peter Conlan
Bonnie & Richard Cornwall
Lorraine Damm
Matthew D'Emic
Sr. Margaret Dempsey
Jena Derman
Micheline Desvallons
Violet & Dennis Dunkley
Ferne Faber
Frank and Tessa Fellone
Michelle Finnegan
Sr. Kathleen Geaney
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Greg Goetz
Goetz Family Foundation
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Rita Iannone
JP Morgan Chase Foundation
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Ruth Kuhlmann
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Virginia McCarthy
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Justine McGrory
Sr. Mary McGrory
Casey James McKee
Denise Mergler
Merrick Pharmacy
Elizabeth Muller
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Virginia Murray
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Kimberley Overs
Father Michael Perry
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Sisters of Mercy – Mid Atlantic
Community Richmond Queens
Greg Sutton
TD Charitable Foundation
Michael & Honey Theogene
Angelica Villatoro
Celeste Wasielewski
Beatrice Weiss
Alex Weiss
Donna & Bob Whiteford
William J. and Dorothy K O'Neill
Foundation
Eliza Williams
Jacqueline Winstead
Liz Wren

*Donors contributed a minimum donation of \$100.00.

We strive to be as inclusive as possible and apologize in advance for any omission.

Mercy Home Happenings & Kindness in Action

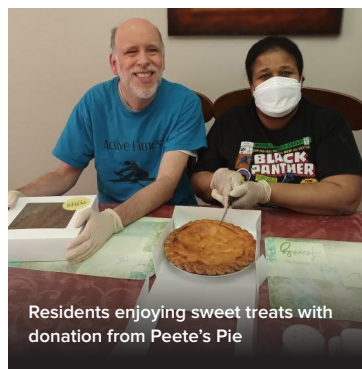
THANK YOU! The outpour of love we received during the height of New York's coronavirus crisis was nothing short of astounding and we'd like to take a moment to highlight local businesses and community members who supplied personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gowns, gloves, as well as food, games, snacks, and entertainment.

Karen Asare
Bon Soir Caterers
Brooklyn Borough Presidents Office
Kathleen Casey
Central Business Systems
Christian Resource Ministry
Corkscrew Wines
DVA Productions
Falafel House
Jim & Nancy French
Kristine Herman
Lisa & Peter Nosal & Friends
Mayor's Office of People with Disabilities
Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership

Our Kid's Place
Pancho Villa
Peete's Pie
Sr. Fran Picone
Putnam's Pub & Cooker
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Soco
Sofar Sounds
Special Olympics
St. Clare Church Catholic Church
Stephen Siller/Tunnel to Towers Foundation
Celeste Wasielewski
Alex Weiss
Beatrice & Natalie Weiss



Games donated from our wish list for residents



Residents enjoying sweet treats with donation from Peete's Pie



Board Member Sr. Fran Picone dropping off baked goodies



NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities donation of masks and gloves



Residents practicing cleaning to keep everyone safe



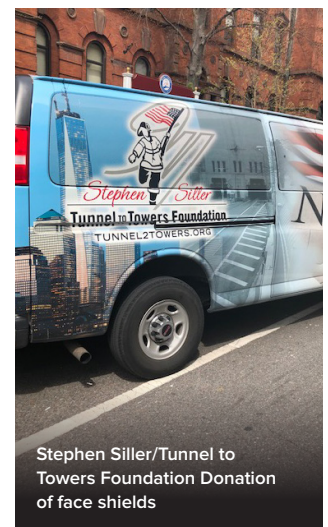
Backyard BBQ



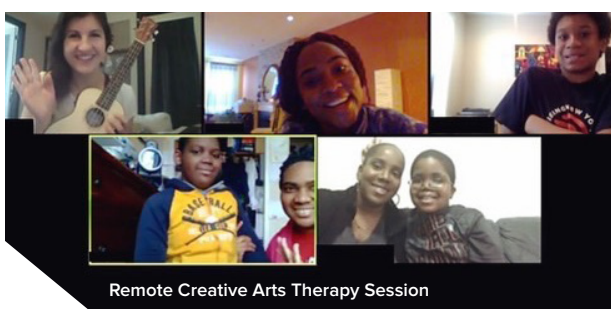
Activities like cooking and baking to stay active



Brooklyn Borough Presidents Office donated masks and gloves for our homes



Stephen Siller/Tunnel to Towers Foundation Donation of face shields



Remote Creative Arts Therapy Session



Car Parade supporting Mercy Home's Essential workers



May 5th ZoomAthon: Mercy Home COVID Relief Fundraiser

On May 5th, we had the chance to virtually see so many beautiful friends and supporters of Mercy Home during our Giving Tuesday Now ZoomAthon to support our frontline essential care workers.

Hosted by Mary Murphy, WPIX and with acoustic performances by Enda Keegan, Neffy, and Paul Sforza, guests were able to enjoy songs of inspiration, see a rehearsal of Melodic Soul, as well as hear more about our work from Executive Director, Janice Aris, and Board Member, Frank Fellone, III. Attendees even got a virtual mixology lesson from Bobby McKee and a virtual wine tasting from Karin Torres of Corkscrew Wines.

SAVE THE DATE: OCTOBER 8, 2020 – 8:30PM

Virtual Beer, Bourbon, & Bites Fundraiser & Auction

The novel coronavirus global health crisis has deeply impacted Mercy Home and the Mercy Home is excited to host our 4th annual Beer, Bourbon, & Bites and our first ever VIRTUAL version!

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we can't come together in-person this year. But we can still have a good time with an evening of wine, beer, and virtual bourbon tastings. With featured presenters Aimee Laseigne of Lieb Cellars, and Brian Facquet of Prohibition Bourbon and great music. Even better, each guest will receive a box of goodies with tasty bites and yummy delights. Proceeds will benefit Mercy Home. We envision a world of fairness and equality in which people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can live more fully integrated within the community. Your support will help us make this happen. Sponsors will enjoy inclusion in pre- and post-event materials. Sponsorships and tickets are currently available. Email Helen at hstewart@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

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.

To make a donation, please return the enclosed envelope or visit our website at mercyhomeny.org.



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