

MERCY MATTERS

SUMMER 2018



Members of the Mercy Hospice family at the *Making a Difference Dinner*, joined by their partners from the Office for Addiction Services, Kim Clark (far right) and James Althouse (second from right)



A CELEBRATION OF RECOVERY

Mercy Women Attended the Annual Making a Difference Dinner

A half dozen residents and two staff members of Mercy Hospice recently attended the 21st Annual Making a Difference Dinner, sponsored by the *Mayor's Commission on Addiction and Recovery*. The event highlights personal stories of resiliency and courage from people who have battled addiction and are successfully on the road to sustainable long-term recovery. Special guests include providers and partners to be honored for their outstanding work in the treatment, support and recovery community. The constant theme of the night was that "we're all in this together" as Philadelphians and people who care about and serve others. The Mercy women had fun getting dressed up for the affair and being treated to a delicious meal and music at a fancy hotel. Many

said they felt honored and special to have people see them differently, and to view themselves as beautiful and worthwhile. All those invited are strong and focused on their recovery. Everyone came away with a renewed sense of hope and promise as part of a community that is mobilized and united in its goal of supporting people to overcome addiction so that "together we thrive."

WORDS OF INSPIRATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."

– James Althouse, Office of Addiction Services

"Individually we are one drop, but together we are an ocean."

– Kim Clark, Office of Addiction Services

"Because of the work and support you offer, more Philadelphians are that much closer to lives free of addiction and full of hope, happiness and health." – Mayor Jim Kenney

Message from our PROGRAM DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

Much has happened since I last wrote to all of you who support our ministry. As we serve women caught in the vicious cycle of substance abuse and addiction, we've seen firsthand the devastating ravages of the growing opioid epidemic. There is increased urgency to step up our combined efforts in the network of treatment and support providers addressing this public health emergency. We have exercised some "tough love" to ensure that residents are compliant with program expectations, including early discharge of those not committed to their recovery, for the protection and good of our community. This keeps our ladies focused on making solid progress toward sustainable recovery and successful transition to healthy and independent living.



Mercy staff (l to r): Hanif Brown, Kate Baumgardner, Lisa Smith, Vivian Williams, Maureen McGee, Nicole Wakeman

Recently I addressed a group of fellow providers at Clarion University on the topic of faith-based support for those in recovery. I firmly believe that our grounding in faith is what makes Mercy special, as you will read in the following stories of our clients, volunteers and donors. Growing up Catholic, I was taught that sacraments are outward signs of God's grace active within us. While most of our women are not Catholic, nearly all are aware of their need for God's mercy and help. We welcome women of all faiths, and provide opportunities for them to gather and pray, reflect, share and support

one another in their journey. So there are outward signs of God's grace surrounding us every day at Mercy. God's loving kindness is part of our culture, or as they say today, "It's in our DNA."

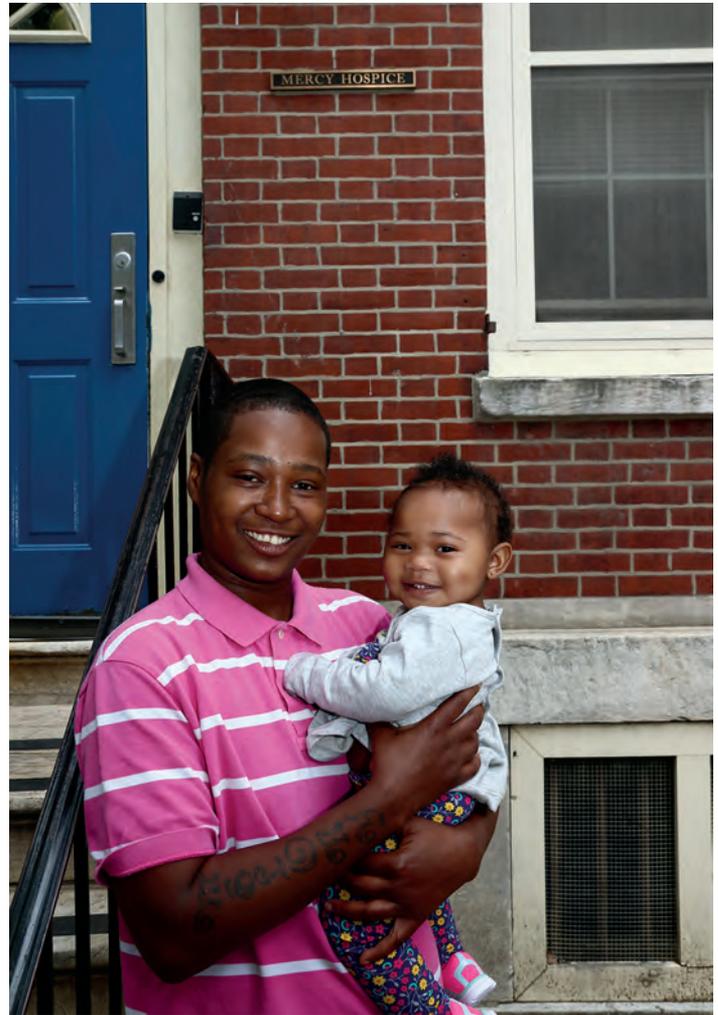
Mercy Hospice is "a stepping stone to what can be" for our women, giving them opportunities to learn how to achieve sustainable recovery, and live in a different way. We strive to help them undo years of self-destructive behaviors and recurring relapse, remembering that recovery is a different process for each one, and more complicated for women, especially mothers. They have to overcome guilt and shame for what they've done to feed their addiction, and how that has impacted their kids and family. For them, recovery has to include *mercy* – asking forgiveness of others, and forgiving themselves. That is easier when they experience God's forgiveness for them.

That's why every member of our staff is so important to creating a caring environment that "feeds the soul" – we need everyone personally involved and available to these women. We have a great team of committed people who invest themselves in getting to know and understand women who've often fallen between the cracks in life. Mercy is that space between the cracks, a bridge for them to what is possible with loving support and God's grace. We believe they are sent to us by God for a little while, and we cherish the brief time we have with them. Thank you for your ongoing financial support that make our efforts possible, and for your prayers that by God's grace make them fruitful.

Kate Baumgardner, MSW
Program Director

MERCY HOSPICE IS MY SAFE PLACE *... loving, caring, and supportive.*

STEPHANIE is from North Philadelphia, and attended William Penn High School where she excelled at volleyball and basketball. By 10th grade, she was being scouted by colleges for a basketball scholarship. Her friends “smoked weed, but that wasn’t my thing at the time.” Then her grandfather died, and to ease the pain, she tried marijuana: “That’s when my addiction started. After that, it was all the time.” Her grades dropped, basketball dreams faded, and two months before graduation, she stopped attending school. She began using cocaine, got arrested, and spent time in prison and then on house arrest. Then she went into treatment, got clean, enrolled in credit recovery and finally graduated from high school at age 21. Celebrating, she took a dare to “try something new” and got hooked smoking crack. She sold herself to get drugs, became pregnant, and from there it was an ongoing cycle of relapse and recovery. She has three daughters now, all born during her addiction, and calls them “the only good from those dark years.” Her last daughter Miracle was born premature at 29 weeks, and she decided then “enough was enough.” She entered an intensive 6-month inpatient treatment program, was reunited with Miracle, and after rehab came to Mercy Hospice in November 2017.



She calls Mercy her second home: “They really care about each of us. I love them, because they showed me and my baby love. They believed in me. They make sure you’re getting prepared to take the next step in your life. I was lost, uncertain and depressed. But today, I’m happy and comfortable in my own skin. I have hope.”

Being at Mercy also helped her get more in touch with God. She remembers praying:

“ I can’t do this myself, God. I need you to take over, and get me through this. And He did. Now that I’m out on my own, I come back because this is my safe place, and I’m so thankful for all the support they give me still to this day. ”





MERCY HOSPICE IS LIKE A STEPPING STONE

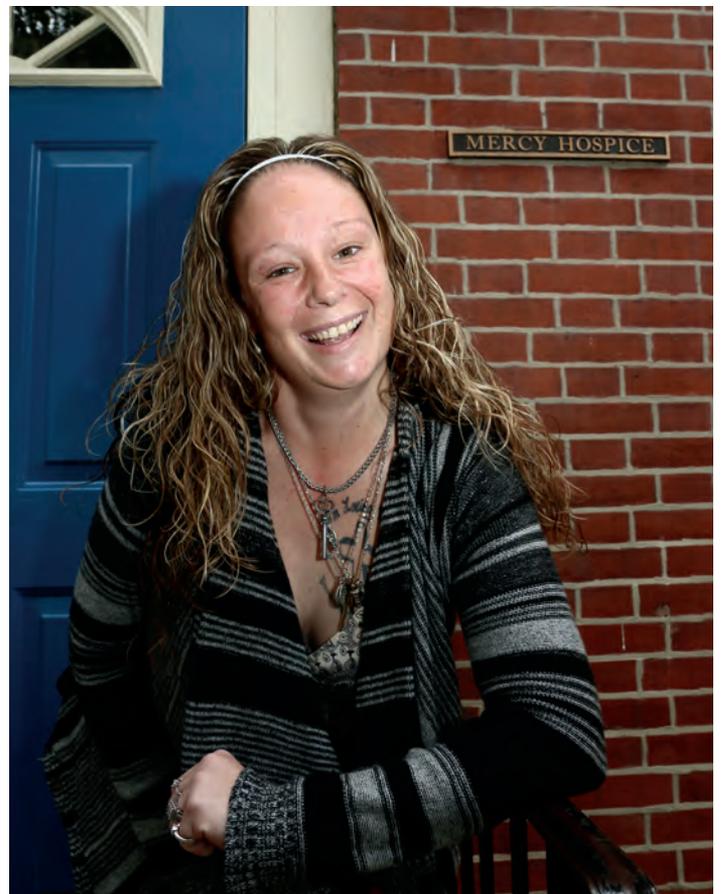
... encouraging and empowering me.

MEGAN started smoking marijuana at age 17. She grew up in Northeast Philadelphia, and went to Saint Hubert's High School, where she played softball and took every art class offered. She wanted to study graphic design, but delayed that to work as an aide at Immaculate Heart of Mary nursing home. She had three children over five years with different fathers, and calls herself a "functioning addict" who could hold a job, pay her bills, and study to become an EMT. But then, she got addicted to PCP, and sent her children to live with her parents for their own welfare. As Megan recalls, *"I just got worse and worse, to the point where I lost everything. My parents couldn't let me in because I would lie and steal from them. They did tough love, because I was Daddy's girl growing up, but he wanted me to get better."* She went in for treatment three years ago, and after rehab stayed clean for nearly a year before relapsing when her older sister died of a drug overdose. She hit rock bottom and tried to harm herself before going back to treatment again. When she first came to Mercy Hospice in April of 2017, had a fulltime job throughout her time there, and went to support meetings at night. Despite that progress, after she left she relapsed again while in a halfway house.

After a third trip through treatment and rehab, she came back to Mercy in March of this year:

"As soon as I walked in, I felt at home, and was not judged. The staff greeted me with kindness, always there when I needed them for anything."

She attended the Women in Transition Retreat, which reminded her of Catholic school days: *"I realized God loves me, and I loved walking the stations of the cross; I took a picture of every single station."* With help from her Mercy caseworker, she is now in transitional housing, welcome in her parents' home again to daily visit with her children, and serving as a peer recovery specialist helping other women in recovery. Reflecting on her time at Mercy, Megan says, *"This place is like a stepping stone to go further in your life, preparing you to go out and work your recovery every day. Mercy was very supportive, encouraging, and empowering for me. I'm so grateful."*



EFM FOUNDATION

continues support for Mercy Hospice

Mercy Hospice has been the beneficiary of ongoing generous support from the EFM Foundation, which provided \$40,000 in funding over the prior four years. In 2017, that support increased to \$25,000, which because it was unrestricted Mercy was able to apply directly to daily operational expenses that significantly exceed the limited reimbursement for services provided from public revenue sources. Without such infusions of private charity, Mercy Hospice simply could not survive. We are grateful for the faithful partnership of the Dooner family and EFM Foundation in the mission of Mercy.

COLES HOUSE

makes major gift to Mercy Hospice

The Coles House, also known as The Young Women's Boarding Home Association, was established at 9th and Clinton Streets by Mary Coles in 1865 *"to provide working women with a safe, comfortable home for a reasonable board ... and to protect them from the various temptations of a large city."* After many years operating as a shelter for women at that location, the residence was sold and proceeds used to support organizations with similar missions. Coles House made a generous donation of \$50,000 to Mercy Hospice, which was used to purchase new bedroom furniture for all residents, a large screen TV in the common room, and computer stations for the women to use in searching for employment and housing options once they leave Mercy. We are proud to carry on Mary Coles' mission of protecting and supporting women.

HEAVENLY SENT PILLOWS

Dorothy Brown worked at Mercy Hospice for 20 years as a Residential Aide and Kitchen Assistant, and knew firsthand of the good work being done there. So when she was asked to come up with a worthy cause for a donation in her role as President of the **Eastern Region Ushers of the Pennsylvania Baptist State Convention**, she didn't hesitate to say, *"let's give something to the single women and mothers with children at Mercy."* This past year her group donated 42 brand new pillows for every woman and child residing at Mercy at the time; this year they are planning to donate curtains for all of the bedrooms at Mercy. A member of Piney Grove Baptist Church, Dorothy says that *"our faith calls us to do these kinds of things for others, pure and simple."*

IN MEMORIAM



MARY CORNELIA "CONNIE" SULLIVAN
(1919 - 2017) of King of Prussia, PA

Originally from Michigan, Connie graduated from Mary Grove College in Detroit and was a teacher in Michigan and Nebraska before moving to Pennsylvania. Her husband George L. Sullivan passed away in 1977. She is survived by sons Christopher, Michael, and Lawrence, and daughter Penelope Woolley, along with five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. Connie was a lifelong member of Mother of Divine Providence parish in King of Prussia. She enjoyed gardening, sewing, playing Bridge, traveling, and she loved to dance. The parish nurse, Ellie Buchwald, began accompanying her to Church, on doctor's visits and to the grocery store about five years ago, and the two became fast friends. Ellie describes Connie as well read, proud of her Catholic education, and very generous to Catholic organizations, particularly Catholic Charities. As she recalls, *"Connie lived comfortably but simply, and was a prolific giver. When she began to suffer significant hearing loss, it created a deep sense of empathy in her for the challenges that other face. She often talked of the need to protect and empower people who were vulnerable."* Ellie said that Connie prayed the rosary daily, and had a heart for those who suffer things like addiction. So it is not surprising she left a generous bequest from her estate to support the work of Mercy Hospice. With gratitude for her kindness, we pray: *Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

THANKING OUR BENEFACTORS

\$114,391
received

Leadership Gifts

EFM Foundation **\$25,000**

Mr. and Mrs. Clair Raubenstine **\$10,000**

\$1,000 to \$7,500

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Ms. Kathryn Wessling

**Thanks to all of our Generous Benefactors who
supported Mercy Hospice in FY 2017-18!**

Your gifts of support allow Mercy to provide our residents and guests with nutritious meals, clothing and programming that fortify the women and children who daily walk through our doors. Your donations of new clothing, children's toys, bedding and casseroles assure that we are able to meet the material needs of those we serve. Without you, we could not continue this sacred work. Thank you for all that you have done, and will do!

\$101 to \$499

Catholic Daughters of America Court 1336 - Holy Trinity Parish
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Saint Raymond of Penafort Parish - Philadelphia
Stella Maris Parish Helping Hands Club
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Ms. Elaine E. Ulmer
Mr. John Weisel
Ms. Bea Witzleben

Up to \$100

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Catholic Daughters of America Court 18628 - St. Matthew Parish
The Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, Inc.
Knights of Columbus Council 15982 - Saint Katharine of Siena
St. Matthew Parish Senior Citizens
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MERCY HOSPICE IS THE BEST PLACE I'VE EVER BEEN

... they welcomed me and my babies with open arms.

Sierra is from an area of North Philadelphia known as “the Badlands.” After high school she studied to become a medical assistant, but left that job due to intensifying drug addiction. What started with marijuana and drinking soon progressed to opioids and heroin. With two children by 23, she lived at home until mom kicked her out for the good of her kids. Sierra gave mom temporary custody to “take care of them until I could get myself together again.” She came home to wash, sleep and see the kids, but didn’t stay long: “I was usually high, so I was there, but wasn’t really there for my kids.”

Sierra went into detox and was put on methadone, which worked well until she got high by taking Xanax with it. In and out of treatment with frequent relapses, she found out she was pregnant with twins. That news hit home and she quit ‘cold turkey’ – “I said enough of this, and stopped on my own” – and feels the twins literally saved her life. She’s been clean ever since, and her twin boy and girl are now nearly a year old. Her challenge was finding a home, as her mom’s place was overcrowded. Hearing that Mercy Hospice welcomes women in recovery with children, she called and moved

in three days later. Skeptical about being “in a shelter,” she found it not at all like that:

“They welcomed me and my babies with open arms and made sure I was comfortable. Everything they can do for us, they do. When I arrived, I needed some ‘me time’ and they said ‘we’ve got your kids, go get a shower and take a nap.’ I’ve loved it here ever since.”

She appreciates how “Ms. Kate shares an encouraging word and big hug when I need it” and finds the staff incredibly supportive. Reflecting back, she says: “Once I was lonely, even in a room full of people. I thought I would die using, because it was the only way I knew to live. My life today is not like that. I don’t wake up thinking how I’m going to get high. The first thing on my mind is changing diapers, feeding and dressing my kids, and deciding what we’ll do today – go to the park, or the zoo? And mom says ‘she got her baby back.’” Sierra is working with her case manager to find housing with all her children, get a job, and live like a “regular person and member of society again. I wake up every day asking God to help me make my kids my number one priority.”

Women in Transition Retreat 2018



Residents of Mercy Hospice joined a hundred others participants from Catholic Social Services programs at the 5th Annual Women in Transition Retreat, which focused on renewing their relationships with God and appreciating their God-given dignity and beauty. The theme was "The Woman God Sees" and featured spiritual talks, song, dance, Stations of the Cross, and an anointing ceremony. Malvern Retreat House hosted the event, and fully covered costs through the *Malvern Cares* program, which benefits those suffering from poverty, homelessness, addiction, or mental health challenges.

RECOGNIZING OUR VOLUNTEERS



Susan Sullivan (l) and her friend Ruth Breland (r) sorting donations to Mercy.

SUSAN SULLIVAN says that volunteerism has always been a part of her life from her time attending Cabrini College over 45 years ago. After a professional career in Boston and later in Philadelphia, she retired and began volunteering at the Philadelphia Senior Center. There she met Ruth Breland, who told her about her own volunteer work at Mercy Hospice.

“*The opportunity to give back to this community is why I volunteer.*”

Susan had actually previously volunteered at Mercy over two decades ago, so she jumped at the chance to return there again to serve with her new friend. Susan had once volunteered at a Boston shelter in their clothing room receiving and sorting donations, and knew the value and importance of this work for the benefit of the homeless clients there. As she notes, “*We don’t have too much interaction with the women we ultimately serve. But I am quite happy to remain behind the scenes as an additional support to the Mercy staff. They already have a Herculean task working with these women who have so much going on as they try to rebuild their lives. I live nearby Mercy Hospice, and love what they are about. The simple opportunity to give back to this community is the reason I volunteer.*” Susan regularly attends Mass at either **St. John the Evangelist** parish or **St. Rita of Cascia** parish, and sees her service at Mercy Hospice as a means of putting her Catholic faith in action.

RUTH BRELAND had recently retired when she began volunteering at a senior center in Philadelphia. When that center closed, she wanted to stay active, and began “*looking for something else worthwhile to do.*” A woman from the senior center worked at Mercy Hospice, and referred her to be a volunteer. As a member of nearby **St. Martin de Porres** parish, Ruth liked the idea of serving at a Catholic outreach for homeless women in recovery from addiction. She agreed to take up one of Mercy’s greatest needs: coordination of donations, particularly clothing, which thanks to the generosity of Catholic parishes and other groups is abundant and ongoing. She started in high season for donations – Thanksgiving through Christmas – but has continued to go twice a week along with her friend Susan whom she recruited to be her sidekick in the effort.

“*Doing something for others lets me show how much I appreciate God’s love.*”

Together they keep the donation storage room organized and ready to provide for the needs of the women upon arrival, and as they leave the program. As Ruth says, “*I see the work done at Mercy as a blessing to the women who reside there, that encourages them and restores their faith in God to never give up. The ministry at Mercy gives me something positive to do for others in need, and lets me show how much I appreciate God’s love. I take joy in seeing women moving out with smiles on their faces in gratitude for the good care they received at Mercy.*”

ON THE FRONT LINES *of the Opioid Epidemic*



AMY STONER, Director of Community-Based & Homeless Services for Catholic Social Services, has been invited to serve on a statewide task force of the PA Catholic Conference formed to address the growing crisis caused by the opioid epidemic afflicting communities and families across the region. Amy oversees the administrative team in charge of Mercy Hospice, but she has also invested herself in getting to know the women there and in other programs, many of whom have battled addiction. She says forthrightly, *“While we have a responsibility to support people like the Mercy women who are in recovery, we must also do more to support families who are adversely impacted by addiction, and at times by the loss of loved ones to overdose. They need our help and support too.”* She is now working with others engaged in the work of recovery to develop a list of community resources and supportive services available to them. Those resources will be accessible on a new webpage dedicated to assist the families of those battling addiction and substance abuse to find the help and support that they need. Another initiative will involve training staff and volunteers as Certified Family Recovery Specialists who can accompany those suffering addiction in their families. As she envisions it, *“By coordinating efforts and pooling resources, we can help people overcome the ravages of addiction in their families. Our experience at Mercy tells us that key to long-term recovery is a personal relationship with God, and being surrounded by people that love and care for you.”*

KATE BAUMGARDNER was invited to speak on the topic of **“Faith-based Treatment and Recovery”** at a conference entitled Communities in Crisis: Opioids in PA held at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. The conference was in response to the growing opioid epidemic, which Governor Tom Wolf has declared a “statewide public health emergency.” Consider: 13 people die of drug overdoses in PA every day; opioids like fentanyl and heroin are involved in 85% of those overdoses; the overdose rate in PA is twice the national average, making it one of the five worst states in the country. Kate addressed how faith and spirituality play a role in supporting sustainable recovery from addiction and drug abuse. The impetus for this invitation was a research project about Mercy Hospice that **Father James Olsen** presented as part of a year-long series of online courses that he took through Clarion University. Father Olsen was overwhelmed by the epidemic’s devastating impact on the communities he pastors at **Mother of Divine Grace** and **St. George** parishes in the Port Richmond neighborhood of Philadelphia.



(l to r): Nicole Wakeman, Kate Baumgardner, Dr. Nancy Falvo (associate professor of nursing at Clarion University), and Father Jim Olsen

Over the past few years, over half of the funerals he conducted were due to drug overdoses, so he decided to learn as much as he could about the problem and what his faith communities might do in response. Kate shared from her personal experience working with women struggling to overcome this terrible disease. She stressed that Mercy Hospice accepts women from all religious backgrounds and is an environment where spirituality is just part of the culture. Women from diverse faith traditions find common ground as together they pray and share the journey of healing and hope. Kate highlighted how her staff fosters a spirit of welcome and acceptance where women can experience God’s mercy for the trauma inflicted on them, as well as forgiving themselves for the mistakes they’ve made and pain they’ve caused others. Mercy is an integral part of the foundation for sustainable recovery.

MERCY MATTERS



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3 Ways to Support MERCY HOSPICE:

Through the Catholic Charities Appeal at
www.catholiccharitiesappeal.org

Make a one-time or recurring gift online at
www.mercyhospicephilly.org

With **United Way** Designation: # 00083

Mercy Hospice Mission Statement

Mercy Hospice is a community grounded in faith and service where women and children without permanent housing can find opportunities for new beginnings.

We strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and support in which individuals and families can heal and grow in their ability to lead fulfilling and self-sufficient lives.

MERCY HOSPICE in their own words:



"Staff at Mercy make me feel safe, secure, loved and cared for. They work very hard as a team to provide us with the best services possible."

"I have gained confidence in myself and have grown in trust since being at Mercy, through the support and recognition of caring staff."

"Being at Mercy has helped me to do more things on my own and in my own time. They put the residents first and treat you as an individual."

"I love the staff at Mercy. They treat me with so much respect, and always have the time to listen to me."



Define: MERCY HOSPICE

Mercy Hospice is a welcoming place of unconditional love and acceptance where the tender mercy and compassion of God and mutual respect for one another are the foundation of our relationships. We are a residential community where homeless women in recovery and their young children can find the loving support they need to heal and grow in their ability to lead fulfilling, self-sufficient lives. Our program focuses on assisting women and families to stabilize their sobriety and make solid progress on their journey to sustainable recovery. Case managers assist residents to develop goals and recovery plans, find employment, work on family reunification and healing, and secure transitional or permanent housing upon discharge. Residents typically stay at Mercy for 90 days, with over 50% moving on to independent living in the community.