



MERCY MATTERS

FALL 2019



MERCY HOSPICE

Walking in Solidarity with Women in Recovery

On September 21, Mercy Hospice participated in the annual **Pro-Act Recovery Walk** sponsored by The Council of Southeast Philadelphia, which drew over 25,000 participants. Held during National Recovery Month, the walk gathers members of the recovery community as well as friends and loved ones “*walking with them*” in solidarity and support. Organizers aim to show that “*this is what recovery looks like*” as friends and family, neighbors and coworkers walk together with the wide myriad of persons who have suffered from addiction and are now on the long road of recovery. Similar walks take place in cities throughout the U.S., in hopes that the stigma associated with battling to overcome addiction can be removed. The Recovery Walk promotes awareness about community resources, peer support offerings, advocacy networks, and educational programs.

Mercy Hospice had a sizeable group participate this year, including staff members from the broader agency of Catholic Social Services, some of whom have experienced a family member that struggled to overcome addiction. This gives them a deep sense of empathy and understanding for what the process of recovery is like. As one person notes, “*This is a disease that knows no boundaries, and can impact the people regardless of where they live or what level of education or income they might have achieved.*” The Recovery Walk helps the women of Mercy know that they are not alone, that others are there to help them take the necessary steps toward sobriety and independent, self-sufficient living. Every year women who “graduated from Mercy” come back to walk with current residents, in gratitude for their own recovery and as a witness to others that “*Recovery IS Possible!*”

Message from our PROGRAM DIRECTOR



RECOVERY

Up close and personal

It has been nearly five years since I joined the Mercy Hospice family, first serving as a Case Manager for women who live with us while they work to establish themselves on the road to sobriety and recovery. I learned a lot about being a source of strength and encouragement for those who suffered traumatic experiences, and caused pain for their loved ones. As Program Director, I now work with both residents and staff to fulfill our mission ***to be a community grounded in faith, mutual respect and support where women in recovery and their families can heal, grow and pursue new beginnings, on the way to self-sufficient and sober living.***



Program Director Nicole Wakeman sharing some quality time with Ikea and her son Legend on the Mercy patio.

and loving community, with the grace of God, some are capable of great change. The key for most is to experience healing and forgiveness, and discover their goodness again, or for the first time. At the outset, it's about meeting their basic needs for safe shelter, healthy food, good hygiene and lifestyle habits, and the discipline of living within a regulated schedule. Some come to us right off the street or from prison, and are barely a few steps into the decision to be sober and responsible for their recovery. Others return having been down this road before, and hope and pray that this time they will turn the corner for good. For all, our goals are the same – getting them grounded in living without using, building self-esteem and respect for others, and creating a support network of healthy relationships that can sustain them in recovery. When they come to Mercy, they know that they will not be judged, but they will be challenged, supported and loved. We don't ask them to be perfect, just committed to the process, taking little steps toward positive change, one day at a time. We acknowledge and celebrate that with them. That's recovery up close and personal.

Nicole Wakeman, MSW
Program Director

I feel well suited for and called to this task as a “Northeast Philly Catholic” who attended Little Flower High School, because I believe in people's goodness and capacity to change if given a chance. While this is not easy work, it is personally very meaningful to be making an impact upon those caught up in this tragic epidemic of addiction, one life at a time. We see them come full circle here, as they fall down, get up and maybe fall down again. Through hard work in a supportive



MERCY IS HOME, *where they treat you like family*

Ikea is a 33-year-old mother of a beautiful toddler named Legend, who just celebrated his first birthday at Mercy Hospice, one of few places where women in recovery can reside with their young children. Mom says simply, *“For him, this is home, this is a place where he has fun and people make a fuss over him. They love him as if we were family.”* Ikea and her son have been at Mercy for three months now, and she says it’s the best thing that could have happened for the two of them. Adopted as an infant, Ikea’s addiction started when her mom passed away and she *“felt all alone in the world.”* This is her second time at Mercy; her first stint three years ago occurred after she had lost her first child three hours after premature birth. The grief caused a deep depression that led to heavier drugs like opioids, and then incarceration for burglary. While in prison she participated in a program called New Leash on Life, which certified her as a dog trainer. She was released early for good time earned without infractions, but the lack of a support network caused her to relapse, and after bouncing in and out of a other programs, she landed at Mercy. Ikea knew immediately that this place was

different: *“I was treated so well, and welcomed with honor and respect and dignity and love. I just felt a peace and at ease, as if I was home. I didn’t want to leave.”* After discharge, she relapsed without the structure and support she experienced at Mercy. When she became pregnant again, and finished another rehab, she hoped to return to Mercy: *“I wanted to be somewhere safe with my son, and I waited months for that opening. I thank God every day that I made it back here.”* Ikea has a job as a cashier at a grocery store an hour away in Cheltenham, taking the subway and two buses each way. She has Legend in childcare while she works, and just wants to *“stay clean and honest for him, to be a good mom.”* As her Mercy case manager helps her apply for transitional housing, she is planning to get her GED. She says *“Mercy is simply the best place to get help for your recovery, because it is all about respect, love, and open arms. It’s like home.”*

“*Mercy is simply the best place to get help for your recovery, because it is all about respect, love, and open arms. It’s like home.*”



Marcey often takes time to share her story with our women over a cup of coffee.

ADDICTION DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE — *it can happen to anyone.*

Marcey is not a typical former resident of Mercy Hospice. A native South Philadelphian, she is an accomplished woman with degrees from Temple and St. Joseph's University, who then taught in public and Catholic schools for nearly two decades. A lifelong Catholic, part of her story is about *"getting lost with respect to my faith and Church."* She always had issues with addictive behavior, first around food, then alcohol, and eventually drugs like heroin after both her parents died within a few years of each other. She was a functional addict who worked and paid her bills, but though everyone thought she was fine, she knew otherwise. With no siblings, she had no family left, and was in an unhealthy relationship that fueled her addiction. After being laid off from work and divorcing, she found herself homeless. She felt guilty for her situation because of the advantages she had, and pride kept her from asking help from anyone, even God. Now she realizes that *"addiction doesn't discriminate — it can happen to anyone."* She entered detox and rehab, and shortly after came to Mercy, or as she puts it, *"Mercy found me."* That was almost three years ago, and as she recalls, it was humbling to *"give up my freedom and surrender to someone else's way*

of doing things while living with a bunch of women I didn't know. But Mercy allowed me to rebuild my life slowly, a little bit at a time." She found the structured life and routine helped her to face issues and get them resolved, and seeing others make progress inspired her to do the same. After six months, she moved into transitional housing, later got a teaching assistant's job and built a support network. But something was missing — she wanted to give back, to help others in recovery. She had stayed in touch with her Mercy case manager Nicole, so she applied for and was hired for a job as the kitchen manager. She has a passion for cooking and loves to serve women in that way, but what is most meaningful is that she can support women who are where she once was.

“It's a blessing to be a role model, to offer support and hope to others in recovery. I am grateful to be alive, and my life now is very fulfilling. Mercy was there for me when I had no one, and now I can tell others that they have a chance to change their lives, to be sober and true to themselves. I'm thankful for every day.”

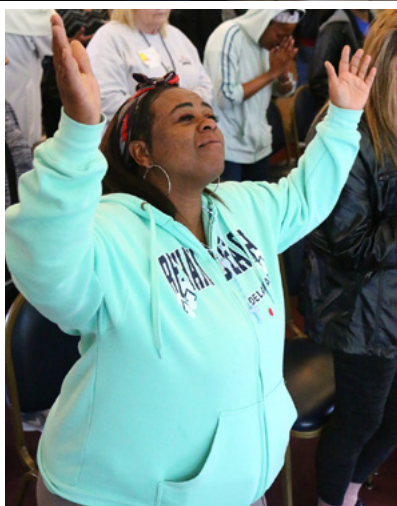
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When not preparing or serving food, Marcey seeks out opportunities to encourage her “sisters in recovery.”



Women in Transition Retreat 2019



Residents of Mercy Hospice joined a hundred others participants from Catholic Social Services programs at the 6th Annual **Women in Transition Retreat**, which focused on renewing relationships with God and appreciating their God-given dignity and beauty. The theme was *"Be still and know that I am God"* 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.

MERCY MATTERS



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MERCY HOSPICE

Mission Statement

We are a **community** grounded in faith, mutual **respect** and support where women in **recovery** and their families can **heal**, grow and pursue **new beginnings**, on their way to self-sufficient and **sober** living.

MERCY BY THE NUMBERS (2018-19)

- **124** women and **19** children in residence
- **63%** came directly from inpatient treatment
- **11%** deferred or released from prison
- **94%** needed mental health services
- Average length of stay **7 to 8 months**
- **51%** discharged to independent housing
- **29** connected to a home group, **41** obtained a sponsor
- **11 of 18** successfully reunified with families

3 Ways to Support MERCY HOSPICE:

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

Through the Catholic Charities Appeal at
www.catholiccharitiesappeal.org

With United Way Designation: **# 00083**

MERCY HOSPICE

in their own words:



"Through the kindness and generosity of the staff and my fellow Mercy residents, I have stayed sober, I'm employed and attending college and I have contact with the child I once abandoned for my addiction. My new life began at Mercy Hospice and for that I will be eternally grateful."

"I came to Mercy with nothing! When I came to Mercy they welcomed me with open arms and helped me get back on my feet. I came to Mercy a broken woman and I am leaving, not completely fixed, but well on my way."

