



# Chrysanthemum

Winter 2017

## MERCY LEARNING CENTER

*Mercy Learning Center of Bridgeport, Inc. provides basic literacy and life skills training to low-income women using a holistic approach within a compassionate, supportive environment. All women are welcome without regard for race, religion, color, creed, sexual orientation or national origin.*



*Lea Sylvestro congratulates her students, Luciana and Nicole.*

## “IT WAS LIKE SUNSHINE THROUGH ME!”

*By: Lea Sylvestro, Tutor*

“It was such a relief to come to the Center,” says Nicole. “The whole team—tutors, teachers, administrators, and social workers—encouraged us not only in our work but also as women. Sometimes I would come in with my chest heavy. I’d be encouraged to talk about it, to speak my mind.” She laughs as she says, “Ahhhhh. It was like sunshine through me! It was like we were friends, like family. All of us there, doing something together to make women strong.”

Nicole started in the Mercy Learning Center (MLC) Tutoring Program in 2013, and I was fortunate to have her as my student. A native of Congo, she was encouraged by her sister-in-law, Taiwo, to join her at the Center to pursue a GED. My other student, Luciana, came to MLC three years ago and enrolled in the Intensive Studies Program. Born in Brazil, she did not speak English and was driven by her desire to help her children with their homework. She progressed through a series of classes to MLC’s GED program and passed all but the Language Arts

section of the GED test. She worked with me to bolster her skills in that final area.

“Being there [at MLC] changed my sense of what I could do at my age [44],” says Nicole. “I thought I was done, too old. But at the Center, you go from one level to another, and I realized I could keep going! I could be somebody! I’d never even thought of college, but now that I have my GED, I’ve applied to Gateway (Community College) to get my degree in nursing.”

MLC is life-enhancing not only for the students but for the tutors as well. Working with extraordinary women like Nicole, Luciana, and Taiwo uplifts me. Their effort and goals become my effort and goals. And when they succeed, their triumph is mine to celebrate as well. A gift! We cannot help every woman struggling for rights, respect, and education, but as Nicole says, being at MLC is like sunshine, in knowing we are helping those we can.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT: JANE E. FERREIRA

*Dear Friends,*

In a new year, we seek change. We can change what we know, what we believe and what we do—our actions. Education is a transforming force for all of us. Come to Mercy Learning Center and assist us in “educating a woman...educating a family.” We are grateful for all of you that support women’s literacy!

In gratitude,

**Jane E. Ferreira**, President and Chief Executive Officer



## WISH LIST

### *What's Most Needed*

- Gift cards (Stop & Shop, Walgreens, CVS, Kohl's, Target)
- Baby items (diapers sizes 4, 5 & 6; wipes)
- Non-perishable food
- **And a new roof for our building in 2017!**

## THE JOY OF LEARNING AND GROWING

*By: Lorraine Wilson, Volunteer*

*"I can't describe the joy I feel when the kids rush to give me a hug when I arrive."*

I have been a volunteer in the childcare center at Mercy Learning Center for about eight years. I am called a volunteer, but actually I would pay Mercy to let me spend my one morning a week with the children! My own children are grown, and Mercy gives me the opportunity for the "baby time" I so terribly miss. I can't describe the joy I feel when the kids rush to give me a hug when I arrive.

Working with all the age groups—from the infants all the way through the preschool class—is a joy. It is amazing to watch the developmental, emotional, and physical growth of the children from the start of the year to its conclusion. Although the childcare center's primary goal is to allow the mothers to attend class, the children are learning as much as their mothers. The



staff is warm, caring, and very good at providing a positive learning environment for the kids. The children learn from the staff and each other by engaging in open play time, music, art, story time, and outdoor play when appropriate. I am proud to be a part of Mercy's efforts, making a positive impact on so many children and mothers.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### **Literacy: A Hidden Problem**

1 in 6 adults struggle with literacy, yet 70% of people say they don't know someone who cannot read.

43% of adults that can read, do so at or below an 8th grade level.

### **MLC: A Solution to the Literacy Problem**

30 women graduated, 90 found jobs and 13 became U.S. citizens in 2015-16 alone.

## STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THE WORKPLACE

*By: MaryAnn Meyer, Volunteer*

An important service offered at MLC is preparing GED students for success with employment opportunities—job hunting. One way this is achieved is by holding "mock" interviews for the students with volunteer interviewers from local business organizations.



The mock interview day brought together all the hard work and preparation of each student. There was an elevated level of confidence and a professional presence, which was evident in their simple business attire and deliberate eye contact. The students were very well prepared, and each one was able to concisely discuss their skills and ask

excellent questions. After each interview, there was time to provide suggestions and an evaluation for each student.

I was delighted to participate in this program and to meet with several of the students in the GED program. MLC provides a wealth of services and resources for students at all levels of learning, and the mock interview provides students with yet another life skill that will certainly serve them well as they pursue job opportunities.

## THE PATH TO GRADUATION

*By: Beth Kelly, Assessor*

What does earning a high school diploma mean to women at Mercy Learning Center? Graduates gain self-confidence, strength, and a true sense of commitment to learning. They arrive at the start of the program a bit unsure of their abilities but soon build self-confidence with each academic achievement. The women strengthen their computer, academic, and critical thinking skills through a combination of hard work, commitment, and resilience. This hard work culminates in an achievement that is celebrated with their families and the entire Mercy Learning Center community.

The graduates understand that earning a high school diploma is the key to more employment opportunities and a chance to continue their education in a variety of exciting careers. The graduates become positive role models for their children, actively demonstrating the importance of education. Their "I can do anything" attitude comes from the knowledge they've gained and the pride they

feel as they conquer the academic challenges head on. Although the graduates are quick to thank the people at Mercy who have helped them achieve success, it is these women who are an inspiration to us. It is truly amazing to witness the transformation of these dedicated women who continually strive to do their very best as mothers, employees, students, and citizens in our communities.



## A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

*By: Donna Woods Orazio, Tutor*

At the start of each year, I talk with my students about their goals. Improving their English (speaking and comprehension) is always a goal that students share. Often women have individual goals, such as reading a book to their little one, understanding information from their child's teacher, seeking a new job, or being more confident when they speak in public. This year, a new student at Mercy Learning Center told me she wanted to "fill her head" with everything. What an outstanding goal to start a new experience! Her goal became one of my goals for each session that I am together with my students.

Blending the materials and resources that MLC provides with current topics, seasonal events, and questions the students ask leads to sessions in which it seems as if "everything" is touched upon. Every topic is open for discussion and conversation as the women express opinions, draw upon their own experiences, and share their knowledge with



one another—which can be serious, thought-provoking, or just fun. Everyone laughs as I try to explain the idiom "raining cats and dogs" with an image of cats and dogs falling down from the clouds. At the end of a session when one of the women says, "I understand now" or "I learned something new," I know that we've made progress towards meeting their goals.

## EMPOWER THE FUTURE!

With planned giving, you are establishing a donation that will be given at a later time. By planning to support MLC in the future, you help ensure that we continue to educate and empower women and families.

Planned giving can also provide financial benefits to you and your family now and in the future.

### WAYS TO GIVE INCLUDE:

- Bequests, estate gifts or trusts
- Stocks and securities
- Life insurance policies or real estate
- Annuities

**If you are interested in planned giving, speak with your legal and/or financial advisor to discuss the many options.**



## JOIN US!

*Become a Tutor at MLC*

It's fun, flexible, and rewarding.

To sign up or learn more, contact Lynn Gabriel at [lynn.gabriel@mercylearningcenter.org](mailto:lynn.gabriel@mercylearningcenter.org) or 203-334-6699.

# STUDENT VOICES

## *Words of Motivation and Commitment*

"My first day in class I was nervous and shy, but now I'm not...I'm happy to have found MLC where I can learn about many things. I came to school to learn English but after 3 months, I changed my mind—my goal now is to get my GED!" - Ligra

"I was ashamed because I couldn't understand and speak [English]: now I speak a little more English...I understand when my children are speaking. Thanks for MLC and my teacher." - Eugenia

"I am very motivated...I would like to continue my education in college but now I focus on more vocabulary for my GED." - Alfreda



## MEET OUR NEW WEBSITE!

Visit our redesigned site, which features all the information you need to become a student or volunteer, new stories and images and easy links to donate!

[www.MercyLearningCenter.org](http://www.MercyLearningCenter.org)



LET'S CONNECT!

Go to [www.facebook.com/mercylearningcenter](http://www.facebook.com/mercylearningcenter) and click on "Like."

*"Educate a woman...Educate a family"*

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