



# Chrysanthemum

Summer 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.*



*An ever-expanding wall of MLC graduates*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT: JANE E. FERREIRA

*Dear Friends,*

As we end another very successful academic year at Mercy Learning Center, it is inspiring to see how the power of an individual can make a difference. Here are a few examples of how the power of one influenced a person, a family, and a community this year.

In the fall, at our *A View of the Harbor* event, 214 donors ensured the future education of women and children through their generous support. They recognized the importance of adult literacy for women in this community through their actions. 22 students received their high school equivalency since the start of the 2016-2017 school year. Each student experienced the commitment of educators—our tutors and teachers—who empowered them to believe that they could obtain this achievement and gave them the tools to do so. This is a testament of how one person can change another person's life. Give her the tools, help her believe in herself, and be there as a mentor. It works over and over! This spring, a group of 15 women—some mothers, some primary caregivers—became U.S. citizens. The tutor that worked with one student was beaming with joy. "She will be a wonderful community member, I am so proud of her! We have received a gift!" This circle of giving not only empowers our students, it empowers our teachers and enriches the greater community. The donation of a car this month provided a mother with the means to find a job and transport her children to important appointments. And the anonymous quarterly delivery of cases of diapers is a blessing for families who are struggling with basic needs.

Lastly, our 30th anniversary celebration will begin in July. In celebration, we wanted to create a video to document MLC's story. Almost immediately, an "angel" came along and asked to produce a video about MLC! So, please take a look at this wonderful artistic gift on our website.

I am grateful for all of you that have contributed to the Center this year. There is no small contribution; all gifts help improve women's lives. Thank you for this. I look forward to celebrating our 30th anniversary with you in the coming months.

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
- School supplies (single-subject notebooks, pencils, pens, sharpies, composition notebooks)

## A PRICELESS REWARD

*By: Dennis Ritch, Tutor*

*Celebrating 11 years at MLC*

When I retired, my wife talked a very reluctant me into visiting MLC. I immediately felt welcome as I met the staff and sensed their personal commitment to the Center's mission. I quickly agreed to tutor: that was the beginning of over 10 years of helping women learn math as they work to attain a high school degree. My experience has been very rewarding, including when I got a call and heard an ecstatic woman laughing and crying, thanking me as she told me that she passed the math part of the GED. Or when I heard a woman say, as we began our journey, "I hate math," and then some months later heard her stand in front of a group of visitors and say that she went from that point to having math as her favorite subject.

As I learned more about the Center, I saw how the tutors and teachers are deeply



involved with every student. That loving bond is evident at graduation time when every student receives a diploma or certificate in front of fellow students and family members—the first time many of them have received praise or public recognition for an accomplishment. Their expression of thanks to the teachers and tutors is a priceless reward.

Anyone interested in becoming a tutor should contact the Center. There are different levels and subjects one can choose from. Be aware—you may like it!

## DID YOU KNOW?

### **Graduation Rates in Bridgeport Decline**

**64%** of Bridgeport students graduated within four years in 2015; down from **72%** in the prior year.

**280** women have graduated from Mercy Learning Center since high school preparation courses were first offered in 2003.

**22** women graduated from Mercy Learning Center in the 2016-2017 academic year. Congratulations!

## "TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN, MUCH IS EXPECTED"

*By: Marianne Laska, Volunteer*

*Celebrating 15 years at MLC*

I emigrated from the Netherlands as a young adult with a degree in Nursing with a specialty in Pediatrics. Once certified, I

worked as a registered nurse for 30 years until I retired.

I read about MLC and its need for tutors in a church bulletin. I am so grateful I called! I started as a tutor, then added volunteering as a nurse for the students and finally as the state-required Pediatric Nurse Consultant for MLC's Early Childhood Education Program.

When people ask me "What brings you back to MLC year after year?" I tell them Wednesday is my favorite day of the week; I consider it a privilege to be there for the women and the little ones. My mantra is "to whom much is given, much is expected" and I am in awe at how these women have overcome so many obstacles and keep going to better their lives, and their families, through the power of education.

My husband always warns people not to make eye contact with me as I am a constant and unrelenting advocate for MLC. Anyone can be a part of changing the world "one woman at a time," and what is more important than that!



## “THIS IS NOT THE END...IT IS A TRIUMPH”

### *Graduates from the GED® Program Reflect*



This year, 22 women earned their high school diplomas and were celebrated at MLC’s annual Recognition Reception where the MLC community honored their well-earned accomplishments.

One of the graduates, Hellen, left Guatemala

in search of a better life. It was hard for her to live in a strange country with a different language and new traditions. She was frustrated by her inability to speak English or drive a car. That is when she made the life-changing decision to come to MLC.

Hellen reflected how “being a student at MLC opened a door to better opportunities. I’m euphoric having my GED® diploma. My teachers helped me to realize that I’m capable of achieving my goals if I work hard, and believe in myself.”

Cesia, who also earned her GED® diploma, arrived in the U.S. from Honduras in 2015. She commented how “MLC has changed my life, not just in an education way, but also in [my] personal life. When I came here, I was hungry for education and MLC fed me. Having my GED®, I realize this is not the end. If I did this, I can do more.”

“I’m thankful to MLC for giving me this key that is going to open opportunities for me. More than having a diploma in my hands, I have knowledge, days of happiness, motivation from my teachers and the result of my hard work,” shares Cesia.

## “A NEW STAGE”

### *NEDP® Graduate Shares Her Story*

As is the case for many of us, or our parents or grandparents, Zoila came to America for a better life. In the beginning, she was afraid because she could not speak English. She and her husband discussed where to find information about a school where Zoila could learn to speak and write English. Zoila visited the Center to learn more, enrolled in the Tutoring Program and then moved to the full-time GED® class.

MLC offers two options for obtaining a high school diploma through the well-known GED® and the National External Diploma Program (NEDP®), which is an entirely online program. Zoila decided the NEDP® was a better option for her due in part to her strong computer skills.

Zoila graduated this spring and proclaimed, “I know that it is not the end, but just the beginning of a new stage in my life that starts



today.” And, she was right! Zoila immediately obtained a job in an early childhood center. Her goal is to continue her education in college and study to become a surgical assistant while helping to support her family.

The 280 women who have graduated from MLC, including Hellen, Cesia and Zoila, have not only advanced their educations and earned their diplomas; they have also transformed their lives and the lives of their families.

## 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.

## SAVE THE DATE!

### *A View of the Harbor*

Sunday, October 1st

Join us on October 1st for *A View of the Harbor*, an evening of cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a live auction, and inspiring stories of education and empowerment, all while enjoying sunset views of Southport Harbor.

Visit [mercylearningcenter.org/VOH](http://mercylearningcenter.org/VOH) or call 203-334-6699 to learn more about tickets, sponsorship opportunities and other ways to get involved.



## WATCH OUR NEW VIDEO!

Visit our YouTube page to see Mercy Learning Center in action! Hear from tutors, volunteers, current students, and recent graduates about what makes MLC special in their eyes.

[www.youtube.com/user/mercylearningcenter/](http://www.youtube.com/user/mercylearningcenter/)



### 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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