

SINCE 1887



MERCY HOME FOR BOYS & GIRLS

*A Solution for Kids in Crisis*

*MercyWorks*  
A Faith-Based Volunteer Program

www.MercyHome.org  
Winter 2008

**You can't live a perfect day without doing something for someone who will never be able to repay you.**  
**John Wooden**

As things cool down outside, things have been heating up in the MercyWorks community. The fall has been filled with fun, exciting and thought provoking activities for the 2008-2009 group of MercyWorkers. Alison, Ashley, Catherine, Eileen, Erin, Jessica, John, Kate, Katie, Marc, Megan, Patrick, Shiquita and Zoila jumped right into their placements with the youth of Mercy Home. They quickly began building relationships, helping with homework, setting goals and dishing out consequences. They have also been involved in planning spiritual celebrations, Christmas parties and cheering on Chicago area sports teams with the youth throughout the fall. But don't think that work is all that this group has been up to. Marc, John, Katie and Alison found themselves starring for the Mercy Home softball team, which made it to the semifinals. Patrick and John joined an area flag football team. Jess has been fine tuning her guitar abilities by taking lessons at Old Town School of Folk Music. And Shiquita is finding her groove by taking dance lessons.



*MercyWorks took home 1<sup>st</sup> prize at the Halloween party as a set of dominoes, complete with a finger to help make them fall.*

As usual the apartment continues to have late night buzzing in the kitchen and living room as youth care workers return home after work. Bourbon chicken, hummus and chips and salsa are late night staples to accompany reflections about work, stories from college and the usual playful teasing of one another that comes with building community.

Fall retreat brought time to step away from the city life of Chicago and relax in Burlington, Wisconsin. The group reflected on their work and community living experience thus far, taking a good look at the community they are building. Good food, football, a homerun derby contest, haunted hayride, fall foliage and low ropes course helped to add to another great retreat. The community also had its first reflection and mass with Fr. Gary, exciting them about faith and future retreats.

The apartment, as always, was opened up to friends and family on Thanksgiving as MercyWorks welcomed 38 people to their Thanksgiving feast. Fr. Scott prepared a beautiful turkey, garnished by colorful feathers, and the community worked hard to prepare traditional family dishes and even some new ones, like Patrick's turkey shaped cake.

Community nights continue to be something sacred for everyone to look forward to, whether it's sharing a "road map" of each other's lives, watching and discussing the presidential debates, viewing movies like *An Inconvenient Truth* or attending a local church to discuss what its like to be a Christian during a time of war. While spiritual and social hungers have been fed with discussion and activity, physical hunger has been fed with some great dishes like John's soon to be famous Philly Cheese Steaks, Alison's homemade chili and Katie's resourceful "junk" soup. The community continues to look forward to each Wednesday night, hungry for food, fellowship and fun.

**Upcoming Events**

<b>December 18</b>	Tree Lighting Ceremony – Hay Campus
<b>Jan 4-7</b>	MercyWorks Winter Retreat
<b>Jan 22</b>	Faith & Work Speaker Series featuring John Horan
<b>Jan 30-Feb 1</b>	"Come to the Quiet" Silent Weekend Retreat – Charis Ministries
<b>Feb 4</b>	MHBG Blood Drive
<b>March 8</b>	Quarterly Liturgy and Brunch
<b>March 14</b>	MHBG Shamrocks For Kids Event
<b>All Winter</b>	Check out opportunities for retreats and workshops through Charis Ministries at <a href="http://www.charisministries.org/">www.charisministries.org/</a> or through the Siena Center at Dominican University with Claire Noonan at <a href="http://www.siena.dom.edu">www.siena.dom.edu</a>

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## Reflections on the Journey



*Kate Tkacik works as the Coordinator of School Resources and Tutoring*

My first visit to Mercy Home, at the end of last February, was a whirlwind overnight visit which began with an eight hour drive and ended the following morning with an interview and six inches of snow on top of my car. Regardless of the interview anxiety and ice on my windshield, Mercy Home presented a wonderful first impression - a beautiful lobby, smiling employees, and youth homes which easily rival my college apartment. Wonderful, yes, and absolutely confusing. Shortly after I arrived, Ian took me on a dizzying tour up staircases and through doorways. Each door opened to another row of offices, another room of people, and another fundamental part of the agency. And then, of course, there was the long hallway of doors of the MercyWorks apartment; doors which would soon open to thirteen of my future friends and roommates.

It's now been over four months. Months filled with retreats, community nights, forty-hour work weeks, a Thanksgiving dinner, a few days off and a few nights out. As MercyWorkers, the fourteen of us have two full-time responsibilities: to work for the youth of Mercy Home and to live in conscious community with one another. Two distinct tasks, two distinct challenges in one big maze of a building.

When I arrive at my office door, I, like the rest of my roommates, join another community, a community of youth and co-workers. We leave our shared apartment and enter separate offices and programs. Here we serve a group of young people who are some of the most diverse and deserving individuals I have ever encountered. Youth who have experienced crisis, abuse, fear and loneliness. Some have never known love, some have never had undivided care and attention from an adult. Over these months we've begun learning how to positively influence these kids, how to give them what may have been denied to them in the past. Perhaps not so surprisingly, what we're learning to give in our programs and offices is the same respect, love, honesty, and hope we're learning to give one another in our apartment.

As Christmas approaches, I'm reminded of our commitment and our covenant. These snowy days have also reminded me of that first visit and all those foreign doorways and stairwells. Over time, the confusion has lessened and Mercy Home has become comfortably familiar. With time, working in the agency and living in community, too, has become familiar. In our separate roles, we learn together. We learn to give and to share. Giving is simply becoming part of ourselves.

## MercyWorks Alumni Update

One of the many questions that MercyWorkers continually deal with throughout their volunteer year is, "How is this

experience going to affect the rest of your life?" While many of us have witnessed or been a part of the eye-opening experience that a year of service provides, four alumni have used MercyWorks as a spring board to continue to serve, this time internationally. As Talia Coveleski '06-'07 boarded a plane last week, she became the fourth MercyWorks alumna in the past 18 months to embark upon service abroad. Her flight took her to Moshi, Tanzania to be a part of the Jesuit Volunteer International community. She will be teaching English at an all girls school during her two year commitment. For more details about Talia's experience, check out her blog at <http://taliaanne.blogspot.com/>.

For Kevin Huggins '05-'06, his continued call to service began when he finished his second year of work in Cooke Home and headed to the remote pacific Marshall Islands through the World Teach organization. There he lives in a remote village, serving the impoverished of his community. He helps to grow food for the village he lives in, teaches English, rebuilds canoes and fights to allow the native islanders to preserve their simple way of life.

Dominique Frio '06-'07 has a restless spirit that took her first to Australia for a semester during college, then Mercy Home after graduation and now Thailand to teach English through the CIEE program. Dominique recently took time



to reflect on her journey. "One of my favorite parts of the work day in Speh Home (Mercy Home's 11-14 year old boys' home) was study time. I always looked forward to sitting with one of the boys and helping him solve a math problem, learn spelling words, find the capitals of states, or practice English grammar. I am currently teaching in Thailand with students of all different ages and English speaking levels. I am reminded everyday of how fortunate I was to practice my teaching skills with the boys of Speh Home."

Becky Nixon '06-'07 found a unique opportunity to live and teach in South Korea this past year. Having just returned to Chicago, Becky recently wrote, "The last two years of service have been extremely different experiences. But both of these opportunities allowed me to learn about people in different environments. Both have given me a foundation to grow upon, entering into my next job and interacting with people in an entirely new way!"

As always, it is an exciting time around the MercyWorks apartment as our current volunteers and even recent alumni weigh a variety of options. Volunteers continue to look forward, always carrying with them their knowledge of social justice, spirituality, community, simple living and professional development.

If you wish to learn more about any of these volunteer experiences or international service, feel free to contact Ian McBride at [ianmcb@mercyhome.org](mailto:ianmcb@mercyhome.org).