

SINCE 1887



MERCY HOME FOR BOYS & GIRLS

A Solution for Kids in Crisis

MercyWorks
A Faith-Based Volunteer Program

www.MercyHome.org
Spring 2009

“The stone was rolled away from the door, not to permit Christ to come out, but to enable the disciples to go in.”

- Peter Marshall

As winter fades into distant memory and spring begins to become a reality, the MercyWorks volunteers continue their hard work at Mercy Home. Though the Chicago winter has been long and cold, this year’s group has been steadfast in showing their dedication to each other and the children of Mercy Home. The winter has been filled with holiday celebrations, retreats, first snows for some, break-throughs with the youth and lots of basketball.



The volunteers held an ugly sweater party, continuing what has recently become a MercyWorks Christmas tradition.

Both Christmas and Valentine’s Day were special times around the MercyWorks apartment. The volunteers showed off their creative sides during the Secret Santa gift exchange; crafts, coupon books and thoughtful tokens were abundant. For Valentine’s Day, the three gentlemen of this year’s group showed their appreciation for the ladies in their lives by buying each of the 11 women a red rose. Right after New Year’s, the MercyWorkers journeyed to LaSalle Manor for their winter retreat which was centered around social justice. Each volunteer had the opportunity to share a social justice issue close to their heart by bringing an article about an issue they are particularly passionate about to share with their housemates. Megan Kennedy Farrell joined the group to explore the Pastoral Circle and Fr. Scott celebrated mass with the volunteers. Jess and Shiquita lead their housemates in an activity, helping

each volunteer reinvest in the service/social justice value of the MercyWorks year. The final evening included an all night prayer vigil allowing the volunteers to take shifts throughout the night to pray for the intentions of the entire community.

Maybe it’s because the volunteers live above the gym or maybe it’s because so many of the youth have such a great interest in the game, but basketball has played a big role in the volunteer experience this year. With so many of the volunteers getting involved in Hoops to Homework, coaching IAA, taking part in Tuesday night pick up games, supervising kids in the gym or simply rooting for their alma mater, it’s been hard to escape playing, coaching or at least enjoying basketball.

Community nights have continued to be a special time for the volunteers. Recent activities have included “road maps” which proved to be particularly rich this year, a speed dating activity in which the volunteers learned and discussed all sorts of things about themselves with each other, and a transition workshop at Mercy Home for volunteers from other Chicago area volunteer programs.

Upcoming Events

April 16	Faith & Work Speaker Series with Fr. Bill Lies: “Catholic Social Teaching...Healing Principles”
April 16	MHBG Talent Show – Boys’ Campus
April 27- 30	MercyWorks Spring Retreat Lake Geneva, WI
May 9	Jr. Board Event at the Trump Hotel
May 19	MHBG Hoops to Homework Championship Game
May 20	6 th Annual Leader Council Graduates’ Luncheon
June 7	MercyWorks Quarterly Liturgy and Brunch
All Spring/Summer	Check out opportunities for retreats and workshops through Charis Ministries at http://www.charisministries.org/

Reflections on the Journey



Jess Hibma is a Youth Care Worker in Walgreen Home where she works with 14-16 year old girls.

It was about February 7th this year when things finally started to click.

My Girls and I were making Valentines Day cookies in the kitchen. A couple of the youth didn't have any privileges, meaning they can't do anything fun, including making and eating cookies. One of the girls had a surprisingly great attitude about it. She stayed in the kitchen with us instead of pouting in the other room. She laughed along with the antics in the kitchen, even added to them, and when it was time to eat the cookies, she said nothing. Once all the other youth had some cookies, she was still standing there. Considering her positive attitude throughout the evening and how helpful she was even though she knew she couldn't have any, the other staff and I decided that she could have a cookie. She was very happy.

Then I walked the other girl who also had lost her privileges. She noticed that the other girl had been given a cookie and so demanded one of her own. I looked at the other staff who simply looked back at me while the other youth continued to stand there and demand her piece of the baking. I finally took a stand.

I haven't always been the most vocal when it comes to discipline or giving consequences. But at this point I had had enough. I told the girl that her attitude did not warrant her receiving any sort of reward. Her consequence for the weekend was a lack of privileges, which was the direct result of her behavior during the week. While the other girl was in the kitchen, joining in the fun as much as she could, and having a very positive attitude about the whole situation, this youth was in the other room pouting. The girl's demeanor quickly changed. *"Who is this lady?"* she was probably thinking. I was thinking the same thing. The room went completely silent. All eyes were on me. What was I going to do next?

"You understand what I just told you?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, her eyes downcast, the room quiet.

"It's all about your attitude," I said with a dramatic pause.

"Now, you can have one cookie tonight, but I want you to remember this the next time you think you can just demand something."

"Ok," she said taking the cookie and quietly walking away.

The room gradually filled with noise again and I caught my breath. It was at this moment that I realized that work had clicked for me because I stopped trying to be someone else. I stopped second-guessing myself and my decisions, and I started bringing my whole self to work instead of only the parts that I thought the youth or

my co-workers would accept. From this point forward, I've found that I'm more comfortable sharing my perspective with confidence because the youth deserve to hear it. Sure, it may be different from the way that my co-workers might handle it, but being too afraid to share myself is a disservice to everyone, especially me. Finding my own voice and confidence with the youth and my co-workers has finally allowed me to be fully present with my work and the tasks at hand. Helping these teenage girls build their own confidence and find their own voice in the world is important work.

If you had asked me in August what I would most want to impart on teenage girls, I would have said self-confidence. If you had asked me if I had self-confidence, I would have easily said yes (too much confidence, then?). I never would have imagined that they would teach me more about self-confidence than I could ever teach them. Teenagers can be great teachers sometimes, that is, if you're open to learning through baptism by fire.

Easter Reflection

This Lenten season is a perfect time to rediscover the power of prayer. In our busy lives it is often difficult to find time to pray. In social services it sometimes feels like you have to choose between the power of prayer vs. action. The following quote has been displayed in the volunteer's prayer room for the last few years:

"To pray for others is not a futile effort to influence God's will, but a hospitable gesture by which we invite our neighbors into the center of our hearts. To pray for others means to allow their pains and suffering, their anxieties and loneliness, their confusion and fears to resound in our innermost selves. To pray, therefore, is to become those for whom we pray, to become the sick child, the fearful mother, the distressed father, the nervous teenager, the angry student, the frustrated striker. To pray is to enter into a deep inner solidarity with our fellow human being so that in and through us they can be touched by the healing power of God's spirit."

~ Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life
by Nouwen, Morrison and McNeill

Challenge yourself this Lenten season to take time to realize the power that prayer can provide and to really experience it.

We want to share in your good news

If you have big news in your life we want to celebrate with you. Please help us share in your good news by emailing Ian McBride at ianmcb@mercyhome.org so that you may celebrate with the rest of the MercyWorks family.

Congrats to Jean Fitzgerald, who was recently accepted into the Masters in Art Education program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Check out Jean's art work on her blog <http://www.heartjean.blogspot.com/>.