



Annual Report 2009/2010



Nurturing self-sufficiency through...

...Education

Mercy Connections provides high-quality educational opportunities for people who are ready to look closely at their own lives. This is essential before many of our constituents find success in other adult education and/or college opportunities. Our work supports people as they learn how to live successfully day to day. As one Education and Transition Center participant reflected “By really taking an in depth look at my own self to see where it is I keep getting stuck, now I know what I need to do to move past that, to move into fulfilling work and eventually college, to rise above my addictions or circumstances and to succeed.”

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- ✧ 125 people participated in programs through the Education and Transition Center this year with a 70% completion rate. Of those who completed programs, 48 participants engaged in concrete steps toward employment, 18 completed personal portfolios of achievement, 68 received a certificate of completion for attending programs, 32 charted individualized goals and 2 have enrolled in college.
- ✧ The Mentoring Program has enhanced training based on feedback and lessons learned. The program now conducts monthly mentor support groups.
- ✧ WSBP served forty students in 2009-10. A remarkable 50% of Start-Up graduates are open for business. A graduate of Cycle 42 will have her products featured in the winter gift edition of a major national catalogue. One of her classmates will be launching her gluten free CSB service in September, 2010 following the Community Sustained Agriculture model. Two WSBP graduates are former participants in other Mercy Connections programs, (Kindling Connections and Getting Ahead).



Heather Gilbert, Lindora Cabral, RSM, and Amy Spooner



Mentee and son
enjoying the mentee/mentor picnic

...Mentoring

Mentoring is an essential practice in the way Mercy Connections relates to constituents. Staff at Mercy Connections describe this in the following ways: “my one-to-one experiences with individual graduates who go on to fulfill their dreams and meet their goals as a result of what they have learned here, motivates me in my work every day.” and “every person on staff is really a role model even though we don’t always think of ourselves that way” How does a mentor really make a difference? When asked, constituents of our programs have told us, “I didn’t really trust anybody. Over the course of the year with my mentor, that changed.” and “She has helped me to grow in so many ways and stay focused on what I need.”

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- ❖ The Education and Transition Center’s new Participant Liaison, Sharon Hopper, successfully mentored 16 individuals who participated in the Kindling Connections Certificate Program this year. This new “paid mentoring” position is based on best practices gleaned from *Mercy Center* in the Bronx, a fellow ministry operating in the Mercy Northeast Community, that has workers conducting similar activities.
- ❖ There was an increase in the number of mentors who have previously been mentees. A “pen pal” mentors program for women with longer sentences was initiated.
- ❖ The Mentoring Program had 59 active mentee/mentor pairs during 2009-10 year.
- ❖ The Women’s Small Business Program increased marketing efforts and targeted outreach to women age fifty and older through a new community partnership with AARP Vermont. A new brochure was developed, and a colorful mailer was delivered to over 3000 AARP members in Chittenden County, inviting women to attend two promotional events held at “The Spot”. The events were well attended and guests heard from 5 WSBP graduates about their experiences as entrepreneurs and testimonials about the strength and value of our WSBP curriculum.



Art Day at the Center

...Community

Mercy Connections empowers people who have been living on the margins to re-engage. “My program gave me a chance to be active in the community. I feel a part of the community now.” Leaders and caseworkers in other organizations become reinvigorated by what Mercy Connections accomplishes with people. A local transitional housing director remarked, “It is a gift that I have been able to see all of the work this group has done.... I do not always get to see how life could unfold for people. I will take with me the ideas shared here; these hopes and the strengths people have shared will inspire my work”.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- ✦ As a strategy for diversion (decreasing the numbers of people rotating through our courts and criminal justice system), women were referred from our District Courts to participate in the “Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' By World “ Program (©AHA! Process). Of those who completed this program this year not one person has returned to court, gone to jail or picked up a new violation. In the words of one graduate, “I have learned to stay out of trouble for me and my family. It feels very good now that I have been doing a lot better thanks to Mercy Connections.”
- ✦ 100% of the Northern Lights residents have mentors.
- ✦ The Vermont Women’s Mentoring Program statistics demonstrate that there is a 50% reduction in the number of women returning to prison when supported by a mentor.
- ✦ WSBP Alumni continued to demonstrate their strong support of the Mercy Mission through donations of 40 items or services to our Signature Event in May. Many graduates and program volunteers attended this exciting event honoring the Vermont Sisters of Mercy.



Tutoring at the Center



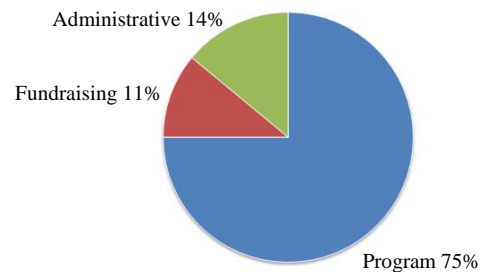
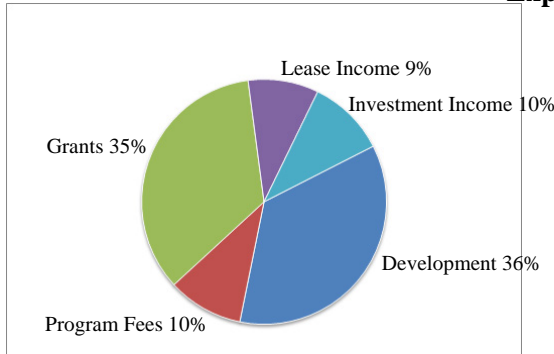
WSBP graduate

Financial Statements

July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

Revenue: \$578,940

Expenses: \$586,461



- ✧ Responding to the economic realities, a variety of actions were taken by Mercy Connections that resulted in an expense reduction of 3% from the prior fiscal year. No salary increases were given; staff was better aligned with demanded services; for the first time, employees were asked to contribute to health care costs.
- ✧ Endowment funds were accessed and used to offset operating costs as stipulated in the endowment agreement. An updated investment policy was approved outlining investment policy and procedures.
- ✧ The actions outlined above have resulted in Mercy Connections ending the fiscal year with a \$7,521 operating loss, which is \$11,079 less than budgeted loss.
- ✧ A Mercy Action Grant was received in the amount of \$30,000 in support of the Strengthening Connections Program. Further we received much needed computer equipment when IBM contributed three computers and a server valued at \$3,470.
- ✧ Our relationships with our partners remain strong. We provided services to the Vermont Department of Corrections, Vermont Department of Children and Families, and the Chittenden County Drug Court. In order to deliver these services we rely on our funding partners who include, but are not limited to, Vermont Women's Fund, Vermont Community Foundation, Key Bank, Sisters of Mercy Northeast, and Jane's Trust.
- ✧ Fundraising efforts have resulted in the following outcomes:
 - ✧ The Spring Signature Event honoring the Sisters of Mercy raised \$48,587, netting \$29,113. The net amount was \$9,113 greater than budget. The lead sponsors were Green Mountain Coffee Roasters and the Sisters of Mercy Northeast.
 - ✧ A 43% increase in annual fund donations with 162 new donors to Mercy Connections.
- ✧ Year-end net assets are valued at \$1,159,210, which represents a 6% increase in value from Fiscal Year 2009.

A letter from our Executive Director



Meet Kristin. She graduated this past May from the Women's Small Business Program (cycle 42) with a business plan to make hair accessories out of mulberry paper and recycled buttons. Before she even graduated, she landed a contract with a major international home accessories catalogue in their upcoming winter edition.



Meet Amy. Amy decided to take our ten week Getting Ahead program. She flourished in the class, learning to identify the essential resources in her life and made a plan to strengthen her deficits. With the help of a mentor, Amy took the Women's Small Business course in hopes of starting a small jewelry business making handmade necklaces. She has returned to the Getting Ahead program as the assistant teacher, supporting and guiding those new students as one who knows the struggles of life and poverty.



Meet Edwige. She came to this country from Benin, Africa. She was educated in her native country and is fluent in the French language. "There are no jobs for people in my country." She worked shifts in housekeeping at a local hotel, spent time at the local library, searched out educational opportunities and came to Mercy Connections to study and practice speaking and writing in English. She now attends classes at Community College of Vermont, ever seeking to improve her English Language skills.

This past year has been a very good one for Mercy Connections. We have **increased the numbers of individuals served** and found strong partners in the courts who truly believe that education, not punishment for petty crimes, will in fact **SAVE MONEY** while giving women a chance to be moms and hold a job. We have opened our doors to increasing numbers of **New Americans** who are motivated to take their primitive English and math skills to a proficient level.

We can't do this work without you! In the true spirit of Mercy, we say **thank you for your support** as we enter our **tenth year of operation**. What a decade it has been!

Whether you have become a mentor, volunteered at the office/Center or selected Mercy Connections to receive your donation, we are most grateful.

Betsy Ferris



We bid farewell to Sr. Lindora, the foundress of Mercy Connections and most recently lead teacher in the court diversion program, Getting Ahead... She was elected by her peers to be president of the regional Sisters of Mercy, Northeast Community...Congratulations!!

Our Donors

We are truly grateful for your support.
If we inadvertently left your name off this list,
please contact us at 846-7063. Thank you!

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SAVE THE DATE,
WE'LL SAVE YOU A SEAT
Spring Luncheon
Tuesday, May 17, 2011

Volunteers

Volunteers help Mercy Connections achieve its mission in numerous ways - tutoring, reading business plans, mentoring other adults, or helping to keep our office space organized and running smoothly. Thank you to our volunteers for all that you do.

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Wouldn't it be great to:

- ❖ Make a difference?
- ❖ Encourage someone?
- ❖ Build a relationship?

Become a mentor!

Find out more at our website,
www.mercyconnections.org
 or call Pam Greene at 802.846.7164

Mercy Connections is an educational non-profit agency which, in the spirit of compassion, justice and hospitality, support those in need.

We are a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Mercy Northeast.

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346 Shelburne Road
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Pictures on front cover, clockwise - Luncheon Awardees - Rita Whalen McCaffrey and Helen Folinas, RSM, WSBP student and teacher, Center participants with Phyllis L'Esperance, Mentor/Mentee pair