



**The connections
make us whole.**

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Please make a gift today:
mercyconnections.org



Mercy Connections

2021-2022 GRATITUDE & IMPACT REPORT





*When all the pieces
come together, we can
all be the best we can be.*

 **Mercy
Connections**
www.mercyconnections.org



Dear Friend,

As the proverb goes, *it takes a village*. **You are an important part of the Mercy Connections village** that helped this organization and community to not only survive but **thrive** during another challenging year. **Thank you!**

While the pandemic continued, **participants worked hard to reach their goals**: some launched to new jobs, new businesses, college, or other endeavors; people became U.S. citizens; and others re-established their lives after incarceration. Many relied on Mercy Connections' services to fend off food insecurity, loneliness, and disconnection. Our staff and dedicated volunteers persisted to educate, mentor, coach, and **provide a safe space for people to connect, heal, learn, and grow.**



Participants' perseverance in these complex times inspired us all to **move forward together.**

On a very bright note, Mercy Connections has a beautiful, fresh look to carry us forward for years to come. It represents that everyone – participants, volunteers, donors, and sponsors, alike – is a critical piece of our symbiotic mix. **When all the pieces come together, we can all be the best we can be.** Don't you agree?

Thank you sincerely for believing in the mission of Mercy Connections.

In mercy,

Lisa Falcone, Executive Director



“Through the help of these programs and the connections I made, I got my life back.”

Empress Williams



EMPRESS
Personal Growth student

FINDING PURPOSE

When I came to Mercy Connections, I was in a dark place. I felt like I had no purpose. I had frequent panic attacks due to COVID and ongoing stress. Then I met Heather Gilbert, who helped me enroll in the **Personal Growth** programs with classes that centered on building self-worth: “MAP! (Make an Action Plan),” “Kindling Connections,” and “Vermont Leadership Training.”

Through the help of these programs and the connections I made, I got my life back. Today, I am happy and moving forward.

I am focused on my passion: cooking! I want to open One Love Café in Burlington. It will be a place where all people are welcome, no matter your color or how you dress. To pursue this dream, I am now enrolled in Mercy Connections' **Small Business Program**.

In Jamaica, there is a saying: “I love you like cooked food.” I love Mercy Connections like cooked food. At Mercy Connections, when your belly is hungry, you get a plateful. They have all the ingredients of good food. At Mercy Connections you get love. You get self-worth. You get strength, and open doors, and open arms. No matter if you fall, you can always come back for a pot of good food.

Personal Growth programs are a series of supportive classes offered in a healing and safe environment. Participants find their core strengths and make positive changes that transform their lives.



“I was surrounded by people who listened to my ideas and didn't laugh and dismiss me as a dreamer.

Mellisa Cain”



MELLISA
Start Up graduate

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

By my late 30s, I had collected a dozen business cards — *all mine*. I'd come up with an idea and make a business card. You might not be surprised to learn that none of my endeavors were successful.

In August 2018, a friend sent me an email about the **Small Business Program**. Little did I know that email would change my path, *a new direction*.

For the first time, I was surrounded by people who listened to my ideas and didn't laugh and dismiss me as a dreamer. With my history of entrepreneurship, I certainly had skills and experience, but they weren't honed. The teachers were the most supportive I've ever had. They genuinely cared and were so knowledgeable about their fields. By the end of the three months, I had developed a 65-page business plan (plus appendix!) and was on my way.

Then, in March 2020, the pandemic hit. For 12 months, I worked and worked and worked. The project I'm most proud of is the ONE Mask Initiative, helping get 40,000 masks to the folks who needed them most in the Old North End and Winooski. After a year, I pivoted toward assisting businesses in meeting the needs of their community. My business is called **Iceberg Consulting, LLC**, because we look under the surface to meet the needs that aren't obvious.

Inclusive Entrepreneurship programs provide education and access for people traditionally excluded from the business world. Programs provide women+ with a supportive environment to build business knowledge, explore, and create opportunities.



“ Mercy Connections
... empowered me.
They constantly
reminded me that
I'm not alone.

Danielle
Braverman ”



DANIELLE

Former mentee

REGAINING SELF-WORTH

My way into Mercy Connections was difficult, but I'm happy to be here and incredibly grateful. I connected with the **Vermont Women's Mentoring Program** after being incarcerated. I couldn't figure out how I had ended up in prison. I had been a role model, been voted president of my nursing class, played semi-professional softball, and received a leadership scholarship award.

I come from generational trauma and have complex PTSD. When I came out of prison, I was completely broken. I felt unlovable. I was utterly embarrassed. Mercy Connections and Northern Lights helped save my life. I was given a second chance. Mercy Connections supported me, empowered me, and reminded me I'm not alone.

Just before Thanksgiving during the pandemic, my anxiety was high, and my fridge didn't have much in it. Then, a small miracle happened: Jo and Kelly from Mercy Connections reached out and asked, "Hey, any chance you need some extra food?" The next day, somebody dropped off a beautiful package with a sweet letter written specifically to me.

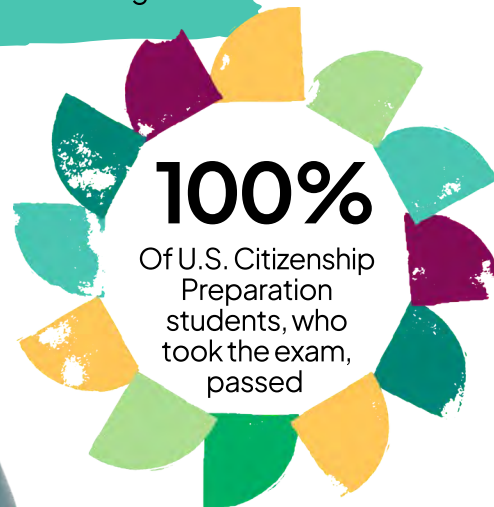
I brought the food in, sat there, and thought about how grateful I was. I deserve to eat. I deserve to be loved. I deserve so many things. Mercy Connections reminded me of exactly that over and over again.

The **Vermont Women's Mentoring Program** has a proven track record of helping women to successfully re-establish their lives, post-incarceration. The support of a mentor promotes systemic and permanent change, reducing risk behaviors associated with recidivism.

IMPACT

BY THE NUMBERS

98% Of participants made progress toward their goals



11

New business launched or expanded

Numbers represent program outcomes from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022.



100%

Of program participants surveyed said they gained social capital & a sense of belonging



349

People enrolled



2,500

Meals + Essentials provided



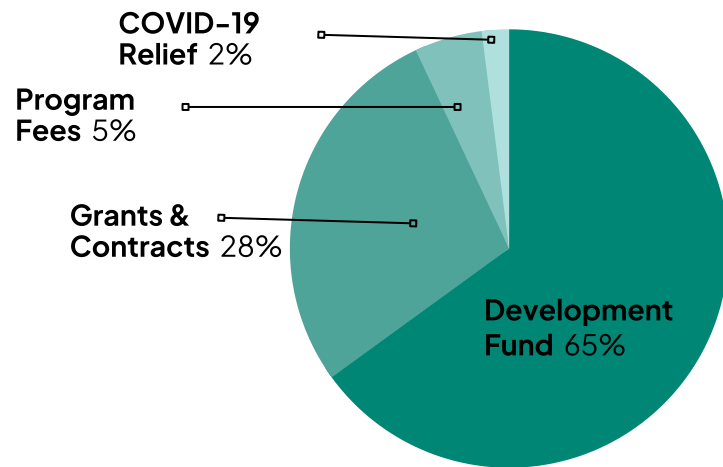
924

Program participations*

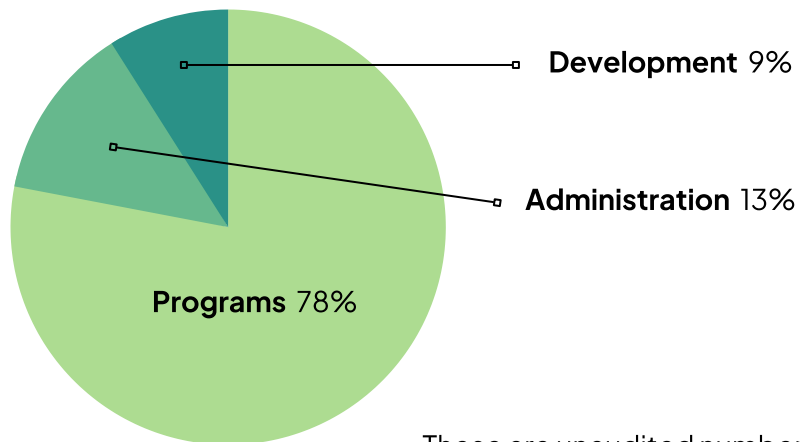
*People are often enrolled in multiple Mercy Connections programs.



REVENUES: \$1,243,680



EXPENSES: \$1,068,357



These are unaudited numbers.

FINANCIALS

Mercy Connections Fiscal Year
July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022

THANK YOU!

Our community of donors makes this work possible.
More than 85% of our annual operating revenue comes directly
from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

**Investing in Mercy
Connections** directly
supports the lives of hundreds
of Vermonters. Gifts come
in many forms:

- Monthly & annual donations
- In-kind donations
- Honorary & memorial gifts
- Event sponsorships
- Stock transfers
- Planned giving
- Foundation grants

To discuss your giving plan,
please contact Marissa:
mstrayerbenton
@mercyconnections.org.

**“Mercy
Connections
is my place; it's
where I come
for community.”**

– Jeff Clark



When I'm tutoring at
Mercy Connections,
I'm also joining
a community.
The experience is
deep and
rewarding.
Kit Andrews



140

Volunteers
provided

9,240

Hours of service



Service matters

Mercy Connections thrives on the goodwill
and many talents of incredibly generous volunteers.



Vermont
would be very
different without the
leadership of these
smart, strategic, and
committed women.

**Mary Beth
Barritt**

Honoring our founders

Vermont Sisters of Mercy

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*Completed service on June 30, 2022