

Mercy Center for Women

# EMPOWER!

[www.mcwerie.org](http://www.mcwerie.org)

1039 East 27th Street / Erie, PA 16504 / (814) 455-4577  
Fall 2017 Newsletter

*Mercy Center Christmas means the world to me. Even though I've completed the program successfully I'm still welcomed back to receive gifts for my children. I am forever grateful for this because having multiple children and one income makes it extremely difficult to provide everyday necessities, let alone Christmas gifts. Being able to come back to Mercy Center and actually pick out gifts for my children takes a ton of worry off my shoulders and lets me give my children a Christmas to remember without me having to choose between paying our bills or buying Christmas gifts. It also allows me to visit with the staff, women and children of Mercy*



*Center for Women who have become family to me.*

Lora Roberts, MCW Alumna



**Inside: Boys & Their Toys**

*To a happy, healthy and joyous Christmas Season from the Mercy Center for Women*



Special thanks to Mercyhurst University who donated their Festival of Tree's project to the Mercy Center for Women.



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### VISTA Volunteer

Emma Giering



## Fall into the holidays at Mercy Center for Women



### Dear Friends

Recently, I came across several archives of the early days at Mercy Center. Tish Donze, former Executive Director of Mercy Center for Women provided binders filled with history, accomplishments and vision. I thought it would be a wonderful way to segue into the holiday season by sharing memories from the past.

Many of these wonderful traditions remain strong. The Sisters of Mercy and Tish could provide a home for 10 women and 14 children in November 1994. In 2017, we have 14 women and 12 children. One thing is for sure the halls are seldom quiet, laughter fills the air and there is always something enticing being prepared in the kitchen.

It is about tradition and the mission carefully crafted by the Sisters of Mercy. Throughout the years the programs implemented continue strong and our women face many of the same challenges. Our history tells a story. A story made possible because of all those who have believed and supported Mercy Center for Women for close to 24 years.

We invite you to partner with us this holiday season! Our women and children are the recipients of all gift-giving. The generosity throughout the years at Christmas has impacted many of our women and children to give back. It serves as a lesson to be thankful and being a part of the Mercy Center for Women mission. It warms my heart to know 20 years ago our community developed the mindset of providing a Thanksgiving and Christmas of hope. (Turkeys, cookies, toys, gift cards and monetary donations) The willingness of the volunteers in taking part of being that difference and staying involved.

I believe everything happens for a reason. A great discovery in learning the true history behind the Mercy mission. As a former resident quoted in a past newsletter, ***“I’ve come a long way. Probably not what someone would say is perfect. But I was never perfect and probably never will be.”***

The success of our ministry is directly related to your belief and commitment to our women and children. You make this possible. You are the catalyst in responding to the challenges our women and children encounter each day.

Let us “Fall into the holidays” with gratitude, appreciation and the willingness to serve all those in need.

Blessings,

Jennie Hagerty





# Our Volunteers Mean the World to Us...



**Joan Butler** is one of our most dedicated volunteers. She started volunteering in the late 80's for GROW (Grass Roots Opportunities for Women), an advocacy center founded by the Sisters of Mercy. In 1994 when GROW and Hope House became Mercy Center for Women, Joan continued as an attendant in our clothing store "Your Daily Threads" and receptionist in our front office. In 2008 she continued her volunteer journey at Dress for Success® Erie where she remains today helping once a week in the boutique.

For almost 30 years Joan has supported our mission to empower women in our community. Joan says, "I feel that when one volunteers they always receive more than they give. It has been an honor these past years to have seen so many women and their children change their lives because of the Mercy Center and their dedicated staff."

Weekly I see clients who come to DFSE leave with much more than clothing. There is a confidence that they receive from the guidance and encouragement given by Mary, Renee and Toni. I truly enjoy working with these wonderful women!"

**Lois Bartos** can recall spending the first night in her new house when her family moved to Erie from McKeesport, Pennsylvania. "The first night we stayed there, I swear, a mouse crawled on my foot," Lois says. "We were pretty poor." But exuberant, lively Lois never let her surroundings define her. She loved always being involved, witnessing the commotion of life and playing an active role in the commotion. When she graduated Strong Vincent High School, she began work the very next day at General Telephone Company. At the company, she worked as a typist and then a cashier. She can still recall details about the kinds of customers she assisted. ("One man came in and paid his whole bill with pennies.") Lois has a penchant for working with people and reading them like a book. As a mother, she was the President of Strong Vincent's Music Boosters Club. In this position, she became a surrogate mother and confidant to the throngs of children that played in the band.

Married three times, Lois doesn't like to settle. And if she has to settle, it's on her own terms. Contrary to most people, Lois loves to make herself live outside of her comfort zone, "the bubble" as she calls it. If something unsavory turns up in Lois's life, she combats it by finding and elevating the positive aspects of any given predicament. For example, when her knees started to ache, (the result of being in a dance troupe "Don and the Donettes" for twenty-odd years) she started using a cane. Lois finds the cane to be a sad affair, so every month she decorates it with festive décor. It's both an affirmation and a talking piece. "It makes people smile," Lois says, "I think that's why I even liked dancing in the first place."

Lois came to volunteer at the Mercy Center after leaving a volunteer position at CATV. Five years later, she is one of Mercy Center's most valued volunteers. Having experienced firsthand the havoc of alcoholism in two marriages, Lois feels that she can relate to the women who come through the doors. "I do this for the variety. There's always something new going on here, and it's a good cause. The kids of this center need love, attention, and affection." Lois certainly has a lot of that to give. As a mother of five, she can recall holding babies while their mothers moved into the center. "I've seen the success stories, and the work that's done here is very, very important," Lois adds.

When she's not at the center volunteering, Lois enjoys seeing theatrical productions, dining out, and taking bus trips with her friends. She loves to decorate and surround herself and others with things that bring happiness. Her advice to the world is a simple, modified William Shakespeare quote: "To thine own self be true. And just because you're forty, doesn't mean you can't take dance lessons."





## Amy's Story:

# The Road to Recovery

Amy sits across from me with beautiful, candid brown eyes hidden behind thick black lenses. Her speech has the cadence of a person very comfortable with sharing and conversing with others, but I quickly learned that wasn't always the case.

Amy was born in Millcreek Township to loving parents and a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. She attended McDowell High School, had two siblings, a brother, and a sister, and spent many vacations camping with her family. Amy will be the first to tell you she had everything she needed as a child. There was no abuse, no emotional neglect, or sexual transgressions. Amy's childhood was that of the quintessential American girl. She loved her dog, Beau, and all animals more than she enjoyed being in the presence of other humans whom she found difficult to understand. But to call Amy an introvert would be to mislabel her. As a young adult, she had a self-described penchant for "pushing the boundaries" of what was acceptable. Her father owned a bar and Amy was witness to many family gatherings where drinking was a way to celebrate

successes. An impressionable Amy began to equate the substance with good times. In the fourth grade, she mixed all the liquors that she could reach in her father's bar and tried the concoction. When a friend shared what she had done, Amy recalls never facing consequences for what she did, something that she believes stunted her accountability into adulthood. "My parents were enablers," says Amy, "when I did something wrong, they never held me responsible."

***"I want to stay at the Mercy Center because I need the structure and accountability that flounders when I'm on my own," Amy says. "I'm re-learning how to interact and build support networks."***

In high school, Amy hung out with her brother and his friends who had developed an addiction for weed. It wasn't until Amy was eighteen that she tried a drug, heroin, that would destroy her life. When Amy graduated high school, she attended college to pursue a degree in art therapy. Despite becoming pregnant in college, Amy finished her degree and moved into her mom's house with her new son, Alex, to take care of her mom as she battled cancer. Unfortunately, Amy's mom lost her battle to cancer and Amy further unraveled. Her addiction consumed her. She was not taught how to cope with death, so she taught herself the best way she knew how - with alcohol and heroin. For nearly fourteen years, Amy lived like this. For eight years, Amy used Methadone and Suboxone, drugs given to those afflicted with addiction to curb cravings while still procuring a high. But neither drug helped Amy significantly. In fact, she tells me "She doesn't remember much from those eight years." Aside from the tragedy of her mother, father, and brother all dying from medical complications, the loss of custody of her three children further sunk Amy into her addiction. "You would think that losing my children would have been the game changer, but the exact opposite happened," Amy says. Theft charges eventually landed Amy in prison, and then rehab. Amy attributes the legal intervention for her turn around. In rehab, she learned that she was worth the effort of recovery, how to listen and have empathy, and that the root of addiction was self-absorption.

Though relapse is a part of Amy's journey, she is now proudly twenty months clean and "feels the best she has ever felt." She works two jobs and has purchased her own car. She credits her new-found spiritual relationship with God for her success. And, of course, she is eternally grateful to the Mercy Center. "I want to stay at the Mercy Center because I need the structure and accountability that flounders when I'm on my own," Amy says. "I'm re-learning how to interact and build support networks." Amy takes each day as it comes, in "little chunks." She's confident this might finally be the change she's desperately wanted for years.



## Little Boys Need Hot Wheels, Noise, Mud...and More

All the statistics available show that children need positive male role models in their lives, that lack of a male influence has a profound negative effect on children, especially boys. Many of the children at Mercy Center have no contact with their fathers, their fathers are incarcerated, or simply not available to them on a regular basis.

One such little boy is Parker, a fun, adventurous kid who loves Hot Wheels, fast cars, loud trucks and playing in the mud. He lived at Mercy Center, which really doesn't have any of those things, with his mother and older sister. However, Rick Fogle, the father of one of the Center's case managers, had a garage with all of that, plus a motorcycle or two! Case Manager Megan and Parker's mother Jenny set up a surprise for Parker – to spend an afternoon hanging out in Rick's garage doing 'guy stuff'. Together they washed Rick's bike (something Megan and her sister were rarely allowed to do!), tightened nuts and bolts on a race car engine Rick was working on, and just had fun.



Remembering the afternoon, Megan says, "My dad had just as much, if not more, fun than Parker did that day!" This little story has a bittersweet ending, as Rick Fogle passed away on July 20th of this year, just days after the Roar on the Shore took place, benefiting Mercy Center for Women. Rick was a great friend to all who knew him.

## Christmas Needs

We especially need gifts for older boys and girls (12 to 18)

Makeup kits

Nail care/Accessories

Sports team logo wear

Basketballs, Footballs

Adult coloring books/markers

Ear buds

Fun socks

'Experience' gift cards – bowling, movies, etc...

Fast food/pizza gift cards

Unwrapped gifts for women and younger children are also welcome.

## Giving Thanks...

Mercy Center for Women provided 38 Thanksgiving dinners to former residents and their families. It is always a wonderful way to begin the holiday season by inviting the former women of Mercy back into the very place they once called home. The Second Harvest Food Bank makes this possible by packaging all the trimmings, pies, rolls and turkey.

The Mercy Center for Women could not do this alone without The Second Harvest Food Bank. Giving back during the holidays is a wonderful way to make a difference and impact a life.

See photos on Page 7







*"Today was one of the best days of my life. I feel so happy and blessed. I feel pretty again. I can't wait to start working on the 14th. I feel confident now to go to work. The ladies treated me great and were helpful. I am so happy... a thank you is not enough because you have helped me take a great step towards success!"*

**A Dress for Success® Erie Client**

### **Dress for Success® Erie needs:**

Season Appropriate Business casual clothing

Closed toe dress shoes

Unopened Personal Care & Bath & Body products

Unopened mascara/cosmetics

Winter hats, gloves & scarves

### **MCW Needs List:**

Dish Soap

Furniture Polish

Cleaning Supplies

Diapers/Wipes

Coffee/Tea/Cold Drink Mixes

Tylenol

Ibuprofen

### **SAVE THE DATES:**

**MARCH 27, 2018**

**WOMEN MAKING HISTORY AT THE  
MARY D'ANGELO PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

**MAY 22, 2018**

**PURSE & PEARL LUNCHEON  
BAYFRONT CONVENTION CENTER**

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### **Tidbits—**

- **Thank you to donors and employers** who match donations to MCW—matching gifts of \$8,500 this year, for a total of \$17,000 in support!
- 96 Painted Lady Butterflies and 96 Monarchs were released at our **Butterfly Effect Celebration of Life** in August.
- **Erie Gives** total donations to Mercy Center \$17,242.09 not including company matches!
- \$40,000 **Roar on the Shore** proceeds will provide a Development Center on the MCW Campus
- **TJX Foundation** provided a grant to help with programming funds



*Jennie Hagerty accepts a check from TJX Foundation presented by Judy Dingus, manager of Marshalls Department Store.*

# *A Celebration of Thankfulness*



*I'm thankful to be alive. If it weren't for MCW, I would not have self-esteem. Also, I would be very co-dependent. Today I am happy, grateful and I love being alive. I love being able to get up and share my happiness!*

*S.B.*



*I am grateful for a new start in my life. MCW opened my eyes to the world and I forgot how beautiful life can be until now. A.N.*

*I am grateful for my life being back in order and for MCW for my two year "do-over". R.G.*

*I'm grateful to be alive. I'm grateful for my family. I was here in 1995 and 2005, and I had the pleasure of being on the Board of Directors. MCW saved my life twice. God bless the staff and all the women at the center. B.G.*

*I am grateful for my healthy family. MCW has given me a head start and foundation for my children. B.R.*



*I am grateful for my family and Mercy Center for everything they have done and are still doing for me. B.H.*

*I'm thankful for being clean and with my kids for Thanksgiving. L.P.*

*I'm thankful for all the wonderful support in my life. Mercy Center for Women is a huge part of that. Ever since they have come into my family's life, they have loved and supported us in every way. Thank you Mercy Center. We love you. J.K.*





[www.mcwerie.org](http://www.mcwerie.org)

Watch for MCW updates  
on our new website! There  
will updated information,  
new photos and videos,  
opportunities to serve and  
the new 2018 Women Making  
History Nomination Form.



"Like and follow" our  
Facebook page for  
updates!



## HAPPENINGS @ MERCY CENTER



*Counter-clockwise from top left photo:*

Level Red Boxing for Mercy Center Residents

Crop Walk Participants – Residents & Staff

Enjoying a Thanksgiving Feast

Warm-ups Before Level Red Boxing

Santa's Helper Larry Schroeck

