

INSIGHTS

A MERCY WORKS NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2024

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Creating Moments that Matter

BY NATIVIDAD TORRENCE, MERCYWORKS PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

My heart is filled with tremendous gratitude for every student who by divine providence walked through the doors of the Clarence Jordan Vision Center in 2023. It is such an honor to be able to serve youth, families, and our south side community. Our growing collaborations and partnerships have made it possible for Mercy Works to instill vision and purpose in the hearts of so many! Students like Troy Huddleston who said:

"I want to be part of Vision Velocity because I want to make my vision strong and learn what a vision is about."

—Troy Huddleston, Vision Velocity Student

Through our collective efforts we mentored and developed 175 young people. We served 1,883 hot and nutritious meals and invested 553 volunteer hours into their growth! While 72% of the students were new to the Clarence Jordan Vision Center we also welcomed returning students who wanted to reinforce what they learned here, whether through personal, professional development or STEAM Enrichment. Every conversation, every project, every workshop, every field trip, every special assignment, every hug, and every smile was a great victory. You created those moments and are the reason their vision is clearer.

Developing Future Leaders

We placed 44 young professionals within local organizations who understand Mercy Works mission to create scenarios for college students to develop personally and professionally while at the same time give local companies opportunity to cultivate this generation's up and coming workforce! By providing paid internship experiences we are not only bridging the gap, but we are bolstering the growth and development of

our Syracuse community. Time and time again I am energized by the testimonial we receive from Synergy students like Christopher Cedano who recently reached out with an inspiring update,

"Since graduating in 2022 much has happened. I graduated from Onondaga Community College in the fall of 2022. Afterwards, I went into the Army from January to April. I was accepted into Syracuse University and am now majoring in Policy Studies. Additionally I continue working with my Synergy Worksite, Brackens Financial Solutions and just passed my Series 7 exam this November. My life has never been the same since Synergy. Thank you for believing in me."

—Christopher Cedano, Synergy Alum

With great appreciation we proudly welcomed Aspen Dental, Cooperative Federal, Firewater Group, LLC, Hey Alec Productions, Jubilee Homes, Michael Sgro Leadership Consulting, and Wildebeest Publishing Company to our roster of workplace partners. If your organization has never received a Synergy internship student let's connect to make that happen in 2024!

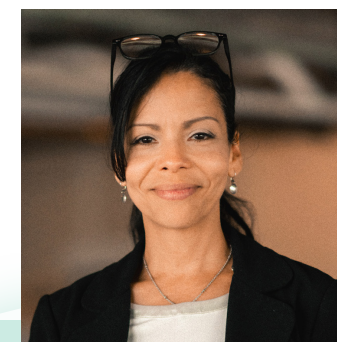
Shining a Light on Literacy

While we are no longer at the peak of a global pandemic, we remain sensitive to the aftereffects, especially as it relates to the mental health and academic achievement in literacy. Protecting well-being has taken on new meaning as youth and families experience stress at alarming rates, yet Mercy Works endeavors to be part of the solution. In 2024, we will continue to include therapeutic modules that provide understanding and self-management

components that help youth focus, process and and feel heard and accepted.

Did you know that only 15% of elementary students in our district are reading at grade level? Take a moment to let that sink in. Stands to reason that something needs to be done to support our district and help to change the trajectory for the 85% that are living daily with the stress of illiteracy. To offset the adverse impact of the pandemic on students reading and comprehension we are excited to share that we will also included the launch of new and interactive literacy camps which will serve to accelerate reading, writing and comprehension in youth K-3. We are excited about this new venture and invite you to prayerfully consider supporting this endeavor. Feel free to reach out if this peaks your interest.

In 2024, our goal is to continue to build new community partnerships, increase caring funding sources and explore opportunities for more preventative work with youth and families. Whether as a donor, volunteer, parent or student, we sincerely thank you for your continued support.



NATI TORRENCE
MercyWorks Program Director

Impact by the NUMBERS

Our partnerships with local agencies, leadership and worksite partners bolster our efforts to effect change at a local level with vision-based programs. We accomplished so much together In 2023.

175
Students Served

553
Volunteer Hours

43
Volunteers

1,883
Meals Served

IGNITE TRANSFORMATION: Join Us in Building a Brighter Future for Syracuse's Youth



It is with great excitement we share the inspiring progress and future plans of Mercy Works at the Clarence Jordan Vision Center, and to invite you to be a vital part of our transformative journey.

By Joelle Harleston, MercyWorks Director of Development & Community Relations

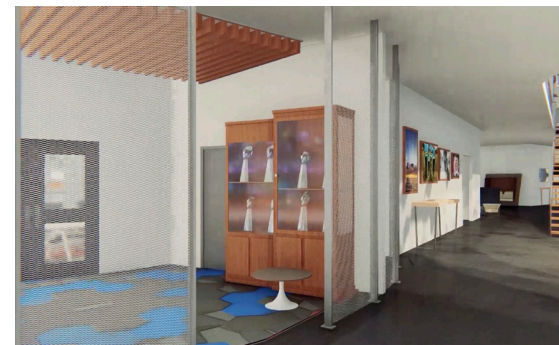
In the fall of 2019, as we set ambitious goals for our strategic plan, it became evident that expanding our capacity was crucial to achieving our mission of fostering education equity. During our Gala, hosted by Tim Tebow, we proposed a potential expansion of Mercy Works at the Clarence Jordan Vision Center to the Syracuse Community and received an outpouring of support. Out of the Gala, a building sub-committee was formed to explore possibilities, considering expansion at our current location, or even purchasing and establishing a second facility within our service area.

Fast forward to the fall of 2022, and we presented a comprehensive proposal to the Board of Directors to expand our current facility and fulfill the vision Clarence Jordan started. In collaboration with our dedicated partners at C&S Companies, we embarked on a strategic planning process. G.M. Crisalli and C&S Companies supported us in various aspects, from engineering and architecture to planning and environmental considerations. Together, they not only provided unwavering support but also embraced the mission and vision close to their hearts.

AN EXPANSION TO TRANSFORM LIVES

We are thrilled to announce the re-launch of the Clarence Jordan Vision Center Capital Campaign. The first phase focuses on structural improvements to ensure the continuity of our vital programs and services without interruption. The proposed expansion spans three phases in three different areas, totaling 22,000 square feet added to our facility. This expansion aims to enhance security, reconstruct parking lots, and create state-of-the-art spaces for technology, literacy, and workforce development. Our long-term goal is to establish a state-of-the-art facility that fosters a safe, welcoming, and innovative atmosphere, creating a brighter future for the youth of Syracuse.

This expansion addresses critical challenges faced by the youth of Syracuse, including educational gaps, literacy deficits, and limited access to essential resources. Recent revelations indicate alarming rates of illiteracy among city students, emphasizing the urgent need for our intervention.



TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS, WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES:

1

Enhance and Create Additional Programming

- Complete the vacant space to add 15,000 square feet, meeting the demand for educational resources.
- Focus on literacy, technology, and workforce development, addressing the unique needs of our community.
- Provide resources for students entering the workforce, including social intelligence and literacy.

2

Increase Capacity

- Partner more with organizations like the City of Syracuse, Community Foundation, Good Life Foundation, Syracuse University, OnPoint for College, and CNYWorks.
- Preserve and enhance security on campus.
- Expand workplace readiness training for Junior and Senior high students.

3

Structural Improvements and Interior Updates

- Ensure a safe, welcoming, and innovative atmosphere.
- Enable the continuity of important programs and services.

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The expansion is set to be transformative, providing the youth with the space they need for equitable access to education, health and wellness, and technology to thrive. It will also enhance the experiences of our staff, volunteers, mentors, and work cite partners, enabling us to amplify our impact on the communities we serve.

LET'S IGNITE TRANSFORMATION

To our many partners old and new, thank you for trusting us to do this work, for supporting the work, and ensuring that the supplemental education resources needed for our youth and young adults to thrive is available to them every day through us and the many partnerships that we have with over 50+ agencies and organizations in our county . Your sacrificial giving has been the driving force behind our programs. To our 90 volunteers who tirelessly make our programs run, we say THANK YOU.

We are "Igniting Transformation" for our community through the " Building a Brighter Future for Syracuse's Youth", so that our students have education and technology access and equity they need to not just survive, but to thrive. We are building our future as an educated and employed community.

Together, let's change the trajectory of our city. Let's witness positive change and build a future where every young person has the resources they need to experience their potential.

We encourage you to make your best gift today, and be a part of this transformative journey.



Program Spotlight: SYNERGY



Synergy offers young scholars the development, training, and exposure they need to succeed in their future careers. This program is designed to cultivate strong professional skills and build an exceptional work ethic based upon four main pillars: professional development, financial literacy, service growth, and health & wellness. Our 2024 Synergy Internship & Leadership Development program will take place from May 28th - August 2nd at the Clarence Jordan Vision Center.

Beyond the professional advantages, the internship provides a fantastic opportunity to connect with fellow interns, colleagues, and mentors hailing from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Our student have had the opportunity to intern at incredible organizations including Upstate Medical University, SUNY ESF, C&S Companies, Crouse Health, Hiscock Legal Aid Society, WCNY and more.



"Without hesitation, I wholeheartedly recommend the Synergy internship to everyone. It truly offers the best of both worlds by providing a legitimate, paid, real-life experience that significantly bolsters your future job search prospects. It pushes you out of your comfort zone, yet it also fosters a positive relationship between career and life, paving the way for your success."

—Will Remillard,
2023 Synergy Graduate

CAN WE COUNT ON YOU?

I invite you to learn more about our expansion by scanning the QR code at the end of this message and to reach out at **(315)371-5330** or **jharleston@mercy-works.org** if you would like to make a gift in support of the expansion.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

With gratitude,



Joelle Harleston,
Director of Development
& Community Relations



Scan here to learn more

APPLY TODAY!

The application for Synergy 2024 is now live on our website! Students can apply by visiting

www.vcsyracuse.com/synergy-internship

If you are interested in hosting a Synergy intern next summer, please reach out to Program Director, Nati Torrence at ncabrera@mercy-works.org.

Program Spotlight:



#FRESH



This summer, 31 high school students completed #FRESH (First Real Entrepreneurship Starts Here). College students are not the only ones seeking substantial work experience and leadership training. #FRESH helps self-motivated high schoolers develop excellent work skills, fine-tune and build their resume, and develop great work etiquette.

Lead Facilitator for #FRESH, Walter Walker, grew up like every other kid in Syracuse, trying to avoid the pitfalls the city can have for you. **"I believe that's what called me to #FRESH—I was like most of our kids that signed up just looking for guidance and exposure to a better side of life."**

Walter leads #FRESH students through discussions of personal development, financial literacy, mental health awareness, career path choices, and how to navigate today's changing world. In the five years of #FRESH, the program has grown its size and curriculum to expose more and more young adults to new thoughts and ideas. Walter said, **"We talk, we laugh, we learn, and we challenge our current mindsets. #FRESH is a family."**

Learn more about #FRESH at www.vcsyracuse.com/fresh



We want to thank all of our amazing sponsors who made the 1st Annual Mercy Works Golf Tournament possible. The tournament took place at the beautiful Lakeshore Yacht and Country Club on September 25th, 2023. We are incredibly grateful and honored that leading the charge for the event was Gary Crisalli of G.M. Crisalli & Associates, Inc.



JWC PAINTING



STANLEY W. METCALF FOUNDATION



2024 Program Schedule

PAL Project

Winter Session: January 23–April 16
Meets Tuesdays from 4pm–6pm

Fall Session: September 24–December 10
Meets Tuesdays from 4pm–6pm

In partnership with Syracuse University, the Photography and Literacy (PAL) Project is a 12-week experience for junior high school students designed to take students through an inquiry-based educational photography & literacy journey, where students develop writing & visual skills through technical photography. The program meets every Tuesday from 4:00pm to 6:00pm.

Learn more at www.vcsyracuse.com/pal-project

Digital Music Lab

Winter Session: January 25th–April 18th
Meets Thursdays from 5:30pm–7:30pm

Fall Session: September 26th–December 12th
Meets Thursdays from 5:30pm–7:30pm

The Music Production Lab meets every Thursday, from 5:30pm to 7:30pm during two 12-week semesters. Students develop music composition and production skills. At the end of each semester, students present a finished product that includes their finished tracks and a brief abstract about the meanings that underlie their compositions.

For more information, visit www.vcsyracuse.com/digitalmusiclab

Vision Velocity Young Men Mentorship

Meets monthly March–December on the 3rd Friday of each month from 4:30pm–6:30pm.

Vision Velocity is a monthly mentorship program designed to engage young men with a vision approach to setting goals for their lives. The approach includes understanding that we all have a purpose and have been created to fulfill that purpose. Vision Velocity meets on the third Friday of every month and is available to young men in 7th through 10th grades.

Learn more at www.vcsyracuse.com/vision-velocity

Synergy Internship & Leadership Development

Summer Session: May 28th–August 2nd

Synergy is a 10-week leadership development and paid internship program for college students from the Syracuse area. This program is designed to cultivate strong professional skills and build an exceptional work ethic based upon four main pillars: professional development, financial literacy, service growth, and health & wellness.

Learn more at www.vcsyracuse.com/synergy-internship

First Real Entrepreneurship Starts Here (#FRESH)

Summer Session: June 24th–August 15th
Meets Tuesdays & Thursdays from 9:30am–11:30am

College students are not the only ones seeking substantial work experience and leadership training. Today, self-motivated high school students are also looking for opportunities to get real professional experience and mentorship. #FRESH helps high school students develop excellent work skills, fine tune and build their resume and develop great work etiquette.

Learn more at www.vcsyracuse.com/fresh

Passport to Vision Conference

Summer Session: August 19th–August 24th
Meets Monday–Saturday from 9:30am–3:30pm

A weeklong life-changing experience for high school girls that fosters positive self-image, vision and focus for them to develop a strategy to realize their dreams. Designed as a personal journey and group experience with an intimate feel, the program addresses topics that are relevant to young women during a time when they need it most. The program engages young women ages 14-18 in safe and open conversation about topics that are relevant to this generation.

For more information, visit www.vcsyracuse.com/passport-2-vision

BMB Vision Ventures

Fall Session: September 23rd–October 30th
Meets Mondays & Wednesday from 5:30pm–7:30pm

Formerly Teen Tech, BMB Vision Ventures presents an expanded version of Teen Tech that will meet twice a week for five weeks from 5:30pm to 7:30pm. BMB Vision Ventures encourages students to take a philanthropic approach to entrepreneurship. Open to ages 10-16.

Learn more at www.vcsyracuse.com/bmb-vision-ventures

Interested in volunteering? Please connect with Nati Torrence, MercyWorks Program Director at ncabrera@mercy-works.org for more information about volunteer opportunities.

Ways to Support

1

Give Online

Visit www.vcsyracuse.com/donate. You can make a one-time donation or set up monthly giving to support a specific program or all of our programs.

2

Mail a Check

Do you prefer sending a check? You can mail checks payable to MercyWorks, Inc. at 1221 South Salina St., Syracuse, NY 13202.

3

Through the United Way

If your employer participates in the United Way campaign, go to your Human Resources Department and fill out a form for the donor. Option Program, designating MercyWorks, Inc. as the recipient.



4

Estate Planning

You can't choose the legacy you receive. But you can choose the legacy you leave. We accept legacy gifts that include contributions from retirement plans, life insurance, real estate, securities or bequests.

Learn more about each of these giving opportunities by visiting www.vcsyracuse.com/donate or contact Joelle Harleston, Director of Development and Community Relations at (315) 371-5330 or jharleston@mercy-works.org



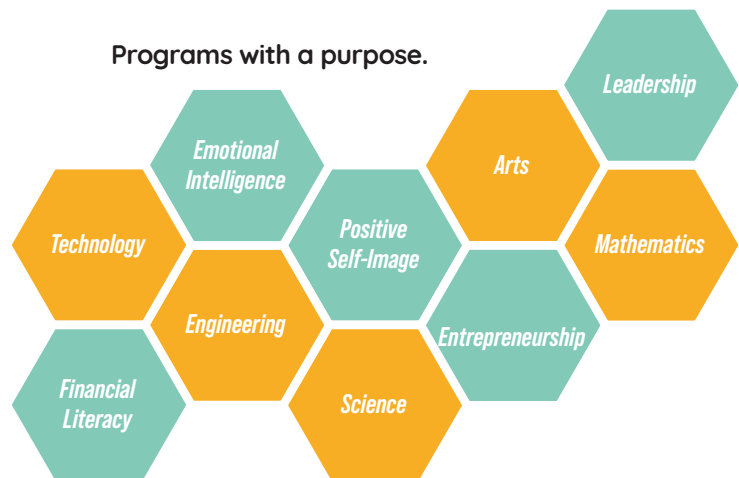
Vision Changes Everything

About Mercy Works

We empower young people with career-building opportunities through vision-based programs.

We provide STEAM enrichment and professional development programs for the young people of Syracuse. We're not just about providing pathways out of poverty. We're about providing on-ramps to a purpose.

Programs with a purpose.



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mercyworks

Mercy Works is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that operates the Clarence Jordan Vision Center.

315.435.6934

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