

INSIGHTS

Winter 2020



Weathering the Storm

Undoubtedly, the twin crises of the pandemic and the recession have resulted in the kind of uncertainty and fiscal pain unlike anything that most of us have seen in our lifetimes. We know that unemployment in New York, and across the country, has skyrocketed because of the pandemic and the shutdown of non-essential businesses and schools.

Historically, economic downturns disproportionately affect the capacity and sustainability of nonprofits—from human services to education to health care—leaving the survival of many such organizations in question. Indeed, one projection-based study has estimated conservatively that at least 11 percent of nonprofits are at risk of closing their doors permanently due to COVID-19. At the same time, the demand for critical and important services, such as those provided by Mercy Works to our region's at-risk youth, is increasing.

As the virus has continued to press us as a community, costs have risen, restricting the number of people who can be served. However, fret not! All is not lost! That is, rest assured that continuing to fulfill the mission of MercyWorks, especially in troubling times, remains our priority and we are very much committed to weathering this storm strategically and with integrity. Moreover, we are cognizant of our reputation in the community for excellence and of the trust bestowed upon us by our generous friends and partners.



We are more determined than ever to triumph over the present challenges and for MercyWorks to come through this crisis both stronger and more vital than before — all the while continuing to provide the outstanding programming and services that so many have come to rely upon and expect.

Ed J. Thompson, Esq.
Board Member of MercyWorks, Inc.

Mark S. & Karla R. Hall Foundation



Tony Malavenda



**Mark Colvin,
OakShield Financial Group**

Cole Henderson



Thank You to All Who Made Our 3rd Annual Virtual Gala a Success!

by Joelle Harleston

WCNY transformed our annual gala fundraiser into a virtual event for audiences across Central New York. The public watch party began with a welcome video that highlighted the years' work of empowering children and young adults of Syracuse to reach their highest potential through programs that focus on academic achievement, character development, technical training, and employment skills in the community.

The main event was hosted by comedian Michael Jr. Known as one of today's most gifted comedians, Michael Jr. brings laughter and understanding to audiences all over the world. Michael has spent a significant portion of his career making laughter commonplace in uncommon places, such as homeless shelters and prisons. He has also appeared in Sony Pictures' feature film War Room as well as a starring roles in Selfie Dad, and MORE THAN FUNNY.

Our special guest speaker, Stephen Ritz is an educator who shares our belief that students should not have to leave their community to live, learn, and earn in a better one. An internationally acclaimed award-winning educator, Stephen is the author of the best-selling book, *The Power Of A Plant*, and founder of Green Bronx Machine - an organization that builds healthy, equitable, and resilient communities through inspired education, local food systems, and 21st Century workforce development. Dedicated to cultivating minds and harvesting hope, his school-based model using urban agriculture aligned to key school performance indicators grows healthy students and healthy schools to transform communities that are fragmented and marginalized into neighborhoods that are inclusive and thriving. In the future, we hope to partner with this type of model at the Clarence Jordan Vision Center so that we will be at the helm of Syracuse's next generation of innovation, education, and 21st century workforce development. (THANK, continued on Page 4)

Synergy Leadership Internship Provides Opportunities to Future Professionals

by Natividad Torrence

Strong community partnerships and participation created an environment for our Synergy Leadership Training interns to thrive despite COVID-19. Many of our students worked remotely over the summer. Forty students coming from 14 different colleges covering 31 fields of study were placed with 21 worksite partners!

While most of our students are local, this summer brought students from countries including Kenya, Thailand, Nepal, Iraq, Tanzania, Congo, China, India, Yemen, Ghana, and Somalia! These are young professionals who call Syracuse, NY home. We are grateful to partners, including CNY Works, On Point for College, Say Yes, and Upward Bound, who expand our reach by connecting their students to our programs. We rely on strong worksite partners who understand our mission and vision and support Synergy by welcoming our students and providing enriching internship experiences!

The Community Service component took a new direction this summer for our undergraduate college students participating in Synergy. During the summer months, when Syracuse City School District families and students had little or no access to food, Mercy Works, REACH International, and the SCSD partnered to provide groceries to families living in food-insecure areas.



Synergy students not only helped to serve groceries but learned first-hand about the preparation and planning that takes place to execute community outreaches as large as these! Students learned how to set-up pop-up markets, handle intake, and registration and the logistics behind organized food distributions. Students were able to participate in six large distributions throughout Syracuse. Many enjoyed meeting each other for the first time. The collective effort and interaction with the community resulted in a transform-ational experience for all!

"I am grateful for this internship opportunity and the connections that I was able to make because of Synergy.

*For the last three summers, **Synergy has helped me develop new levels of personal and professional growth.** As interns, we are able to benefit from this program because of the work that you and the staff put in."*

*Canab Sheekh Nuur, Political Science Major,
Syracuse University, 2021*



We closed out the Synergy internship with a drive-thru graduation that brought together many of our mentors, workplace partners, supervisors, and workshop facilitators to commemorate the hard work the students put forth amidst a pandemic. Students openly shared about their experiences, confirming for all stakeholders that our joint effort is positively affecting their trajectory, their vision, and the future of Syracuse!

Thank You to All Who Made Our 3rd Annual Virtual Gala a Success!

(THANK, from page 2) Everyone deserves a hope and a vision for their future. **Great local businesses understand and believe in this mission and have made our event possible for three years running.** This is such an important program to our sponsors because they understand and value the importance of creating a safe place for innovation, education, and mentorship.

For information on **how to get involved** as a mentor, workshop facilitator, or if you would like to receive a Synergy intern during the summer of 2021, reach out to our Program Director, Nati Torrence.

"No matter what amount I give, my support says our kids' vision & dreams are important. This work is bigger than me; it's bigger than any of us. That's why we are in it together."
Gary Crisalli

Looking Forward to 2021

by **Natividad Torrence**

For 2021, we look forward to continuing with an in-person curriculum and offering new and engaging opportunities for young people! We invite our community to check our website regularly for updates and the schedule for our entire course offering. **Two new and exciting programs for 2021:**

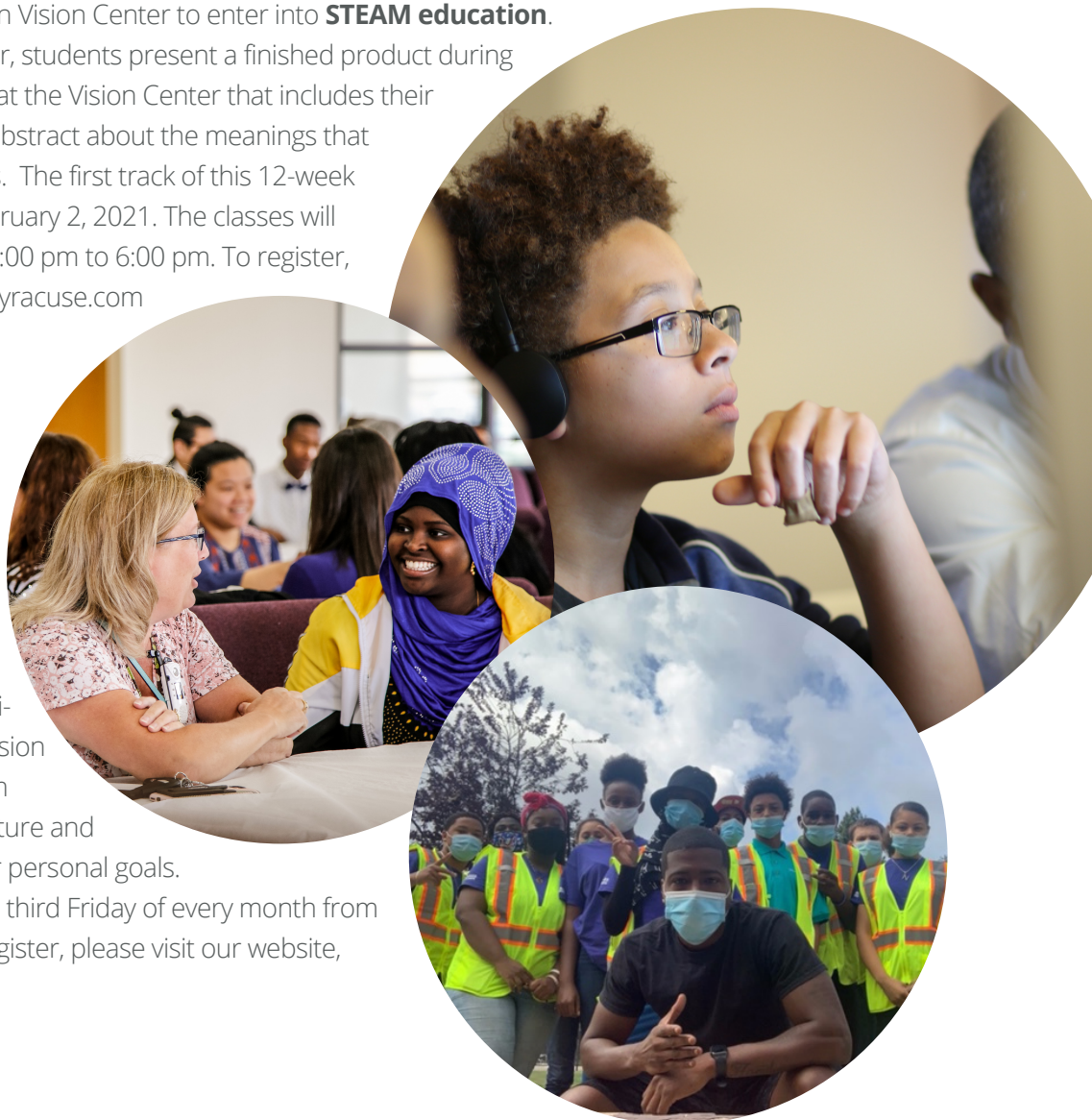
Digital Music Lab

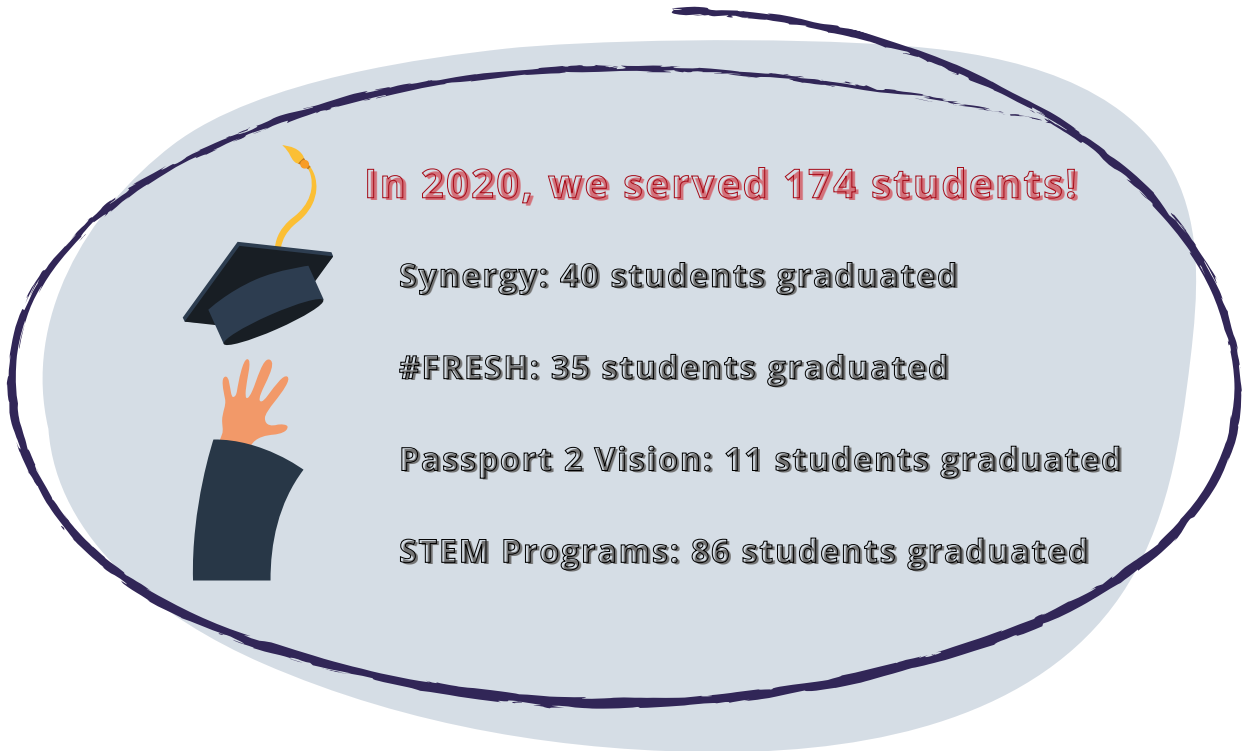
In partnership with the Syracuse University Music Department, we will be offering an exciting two-track program that will provide a rich music learning experience for high school students. This lab will give **an inquiry-based music education built around digital music technology and audio production** allowing the Clarence Jordan Vision Center to enter into **STEAM education**.

At the end of each semester, students present a finished product during a summative event hosted at the Vision Center that includes their finished tracks and a brief abstract about the meanings that underlie their compositions. The first track of this 12-week program is set to begin February 2, 2021. The classes will meet every Tuesday from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. To register, please visit our website, vcsyracuse.com

Vision Velocity

A **monthly mentorship program** for youth entering 7th, 8th, and 9th grades provides training and development around vision-centered living. Students are engaged through interactive activities, workshops, and discussion groups geared to help them develop a vision for their future and build a plan to achieve their personal goals. Vision Velocity will meet the third Friday of every month from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm. To register, please visit our website, vcsyracuse.com.





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