

INSIGHTS

A MERCY WORKS NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2021

What's Inside

01. Year in Review

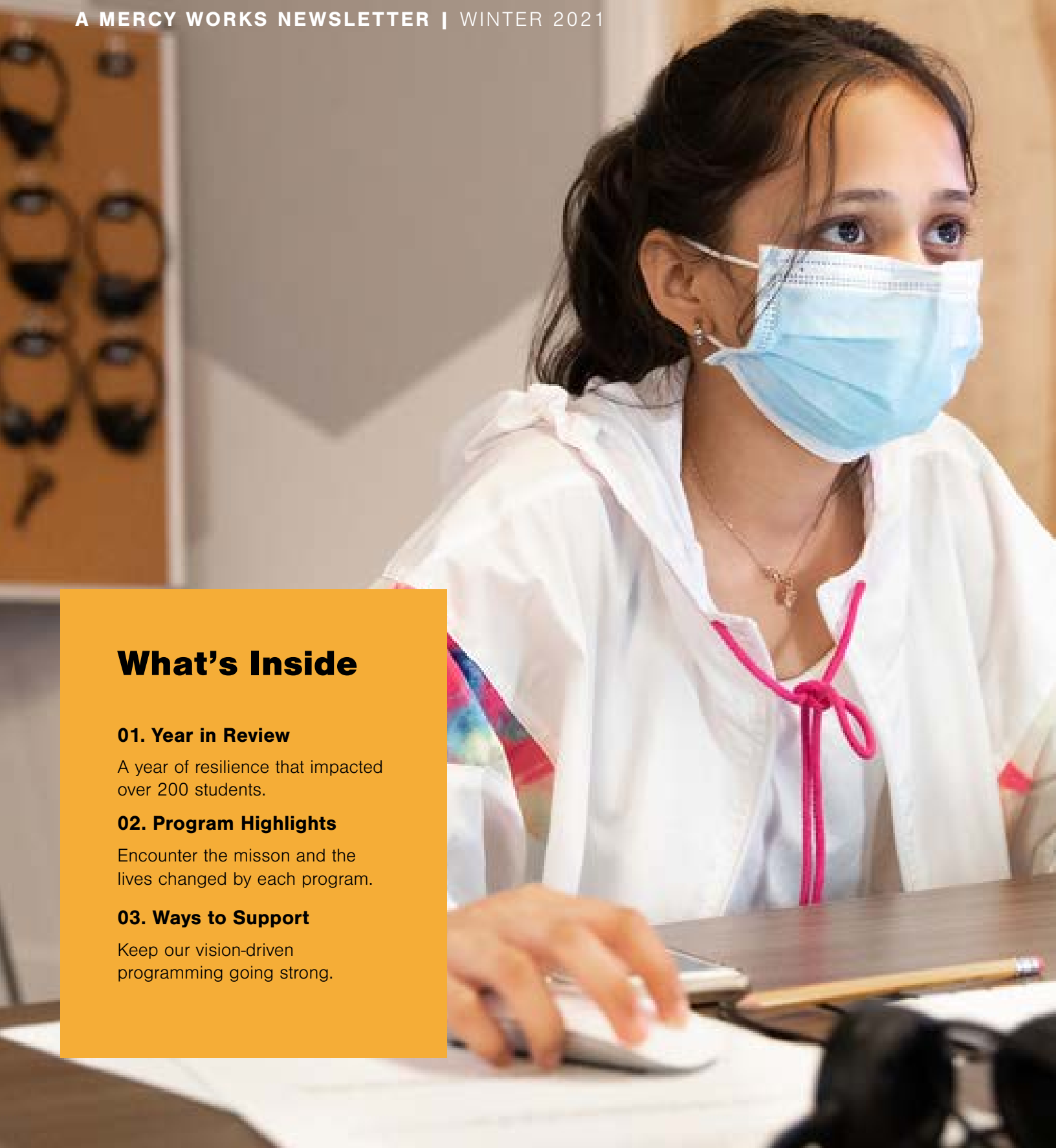
A year of resilience that impacted over 200 students.

02. Program Highlights

Encounter the mission and the lives changed by each program.

03. Ways to Support

Keep our vision-driven programming going strong.





A Year of Progress and Partnership

Our efforts in 2021 enriched and developed 203 young people in Syracuse, New York.

Key accomplishments include:

- The facilitation of two Digital Music Labs with the Syracuse University Music Department.
- A student-led community outreach event that served refugee populations through this summer's Synergy Leadership Training Internship.
- Community beautification projects that resulted from our continued partnership with Onondaga Earth Corps and our job readiness training program for high school students.
- An engaging summer camp experience for youth ages 5-17 in partnership with Dunbar Association.
- A youth directed entrepreneurship expo that culminated from our BMB Vision Ventures program.

Rebuilding Our Community

By Natividad Torrence,
Mercy Works Program Director

What an exciting, resilience-building year 2021 has been! We are so proud of our young people and how they have come out of a pandemic ready to step into learning spaces and collaborate with the adults in their lives to re-engage and acquire new skills.

Together we proved that how we achieve is not just by mind over matter. We achieve by faith over mind and matter. I am so thankful to our staff, volunteers, parents, students, our friends and supporters.

This unique community of individuals show up time and time again with a perspective and attitude that convinces our young people of the innate value, gifts and talents they have that the world needs!

We are so thankful for every program facilitator, for every mentor, and all the 'hands-on' and 'behind-the-scenes' individuals that stepped up every time we called. Whether they gave their time, talent or treasure; it all together made what could have been a difficult season very fruitful, joyful and very satisfying. can only say God is good!

I can only say God is good! Despite the residual impacts of COVID and low level reserves rippling through the non-profit sector, we pressed into our three-fold organizational mission: to deliver vision-based programming, to build new partnerships to better serve youth and families and to engage in projects that improve the quality of life for young people in our community.

While we began 2021 with a Code Orange due to COVID-19, we moved forward with planning, and prepared to transition fully out of virtual programming and re-engage our student population and families. Early February, observing PPE protocols, we began offering in-person programs. We continued with reduced class sizes to ensure student and staff safety and parent peace of mind.

We provided training and mentorship to help youth develop strong character and a vision for their lives and encourage their participation in the process of transforming our vibrant south side community! They rose to the occasion and have made us all proud.

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The young people we serve get to discover their innate value, unique gifts and talents they have and that the world needs.

In 2021, we served 203 students.

39

Students Participated in STEAM Enrichment Programs

70

Students Participated in Professional Development Programs

23

Students Participated in Personal Development Programs

71

Students Participated in Summer Camp Programs



Canab Sheekh-Nuur, Syracuse University '21, Political Science Major. Canab has participated in Synergy for the last four years and is now headed to Howard Law School.



Tajaneah Williams, SUNY Oswego, '21, Human Development Major. Tajaneah is interested in counseling and will be the first person in her family to attend graduate school.

Synergy Internship Program

Internships help self-motivated students bolster their career path with real-life experience. The Synergy Leadership Internship offers young scholars the development, training, and exposure they need to succeed.

This summer, 35 undergraduate students completed the Synergy Leadership Internship program. Their time with us resulted in an in-depth sense of their personal vision and provided them with tools to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and leverage both in order to build a better future.

It is with tremendous gratitude that we can say that it could not have been accomplished without the incredible support and participation of our community. We are so thankful to the donors and all of the valued friends of MercyWorks who supported this summer’s program through our Synergy Golfless Tournament.

We are thankful to the worksites who committed to receive at least one Synergy student and provide them with meaningful, real-life work experience.

We are thankful to the speakers and facilitators who showed up with sleeves rolled up and engaged our young professionals in training sessions, simulations and candid discussions that challenged their thinking on themes such as finances, community and civic engagement, personal and professional growth and their social emotional wellbeing.

We are thankful to the mentors that met with our students regularly to share their experience and provide support on the journey that the students are embarking on personally and professionally.

Many were the friends and partners who linked arms to encourage our future leaders to keep moving forward Synergy was featured in Destiny, the National Grid Foundation newsletter.

The article, titled, “MercyWorks Readies Student for the Future,” shares on the success of the program and highlights 2021 Synergy graduates: Tajaneah Williams and Canab Sheekh-Nuur. National Grid has been a consistent financial supporter of Synergy, and we are extremely thankful for their partnership with MercyWorks to create great opportunities for our young professionals. .



DeMong Park Event

On July 24, students set up tents and unloaded food trucks at DeMong Park in Syracuse and, together with REACH Community Relief International, distributed 150 bags of groceries to families in need.

Local agencies that joined our efforts included: RISE, OnPoint for College, Catholic Charities, Hopeprint, InterFaith Works, and United Way of Northern New York.

The Synergize Syracuse Outreach was a tremendous win this summer. Students under the coaching of REACH received training and development in community outreach from ideation to execution including marketing, logistics, food distribution, set-up, tear-down, intake and engagement.

The event drew the attention of WSTM News Channel 3, who covered the event live.



Murjani Ramazani who was placed at Elms Elementary for his internship was offered a full time position. Murjani attended SUNY Buffalo where he achieved a degree in Sociology & Urban Civic Education. We wish Murjani great success!



Eh Moemo Qui was placed with Onondaga Earth Corps as a Crew Leader for his internship and was asked if he would consider continuing with OEC full time. Moemo achieved a degree in Environmental Science Systems from Lemoyne College and is now at OEC as a full time Crew Leader. Congratulations Moemo!

2022 Synergy Application Open Now!

The application for Synergy 2022 is already live on our website. Students can apply by going to the programs page on the website. If you are interested in hosting a Synergy intern for the summer of 2022, please reach out to Program Director, Nati Torrence at ncabrera@mercy-works.org.

From STEM to STEAM: The Digital Music Lab

The Digital Music Lab is a partnership between MercyWorks and Syracuse University that engages high school students and exposes them to careers in audio engineering and music production.

This year high school students signed onto Macs at the Vision Center outfitted with headphones, digital keyboards and Novation Launchpads to create drum tracks and beats that culminated into musical compositions and sound tracks on Ableton Live.

This expansion from STEM to STEAM really fulfilled a need that our students have to express themselves through the arts and opened a new way for us to share the theme of vision with them!

Track one of this 12-week program ran February through April and the second track ran May through August. The Digital Music Lab curriculum takes our high school students through an inquiry-based music education journey where they develop music composition and production skills. This level of exposure to music education helps our young people grab ahold of a vision that could possibly include careers they previously might not have considered.'

Our high school students were engaged by graduate level students of Syracuse University who served as guides and advisors, helping students troubleshoot and navigate the software application to help the youth produce great music. We are looking forward to running two tracks in 2022.



David Knapp, assistant professor of music education, huddles with his class of graduate students at Mercy Works.



Cooper Elizabeth Klares G'21 (left) assists high school students with their digital music compositions.



Snap a picture of this QR code to view the article featured in the Arts & Culture section of Syracuse University News.



#FRESH Job Readiness Program

We equipped our high school students with soft and hard skills through our job readiness training program. In partnership with Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) our Mercy Works facilitator provided training every Tuesday and Thursday through the summer to 25 high school students.

Weekly training and engagement included themes such as staying physically fit, financially fit, and mentally fit. Our goal was to work right along side the OEC team to help the students develop an understanding of vision and the impact it has on their personal lives.

Our mission is to build them up to a place where they developed the character and stamina to stay on point daily with their personal vision. We addressed topics that were relevant to them and utilizing activities and discussion reviews that they could easily retain.

And while we provided workshops to develop them personally and professionally they spent the rest of their time exploring the outdoors with OEC taking on major cleanup and beautification projects throughout Syracuse.

These assignments helped students become more aware about invasive species management techniques, green infrastructure maintenance and the importance of keeping our Onondaga parks clean!

It was wonderful to witness the pride they took in their power point presentations of the before and after pictures of some of the beautification projects they took on!

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Personal Development for Vision Centered Living

These programs give young people the tools to navigate the world they live in with a renewed sense of hope for their future, purpose and vision.

Our Passport 2 Vision week-long program for young women and our Vision Velocity monthly mentorship program for young men lay the foundation of purposeful living, vision development, social and emotional wellbeing and making healthy choices.

Our young people live in a world that bombards them with conflicting messages that lead to anxiety and depression, but thankfully these programs give young people the tools to navigate the world they live in with a renewed sense of hope for their future, purpose and vision.

We are so thankful for community leaders who have welcomed every opportunity to bolster our efforts to fill our students' toolboxes with everything they need to navigate their world successfully. In both programs we have been able to leverage professional leadership who have done a magnificent job at presenting content through myth-busting activities and discussions designed to bring to surface challenges and beliefs they struggle with regularly.

Passport 2 Vision

Our Passport 2 Vision week-long program for young women and our Vision Velocity monthly mentorship program for young men lay the foundation of purposeful living, vision development, social and emotional wellbeing and making healthy choices.



The overarching theme for this summer's Passport 2 Vision program was Relationships & Resilience. Our facilitators covered topics such as healthy and unhealthy relationships, positive self-image, personal vision plans, living life on purpose, and career exploration.

The young ladies surveyed at the conclusion of the program confirmed that their understanding of what vision is was greatly expanded through the program. In addition, after completing the program not only do they have a greater understanding of vision, but that through the course of their time with us they developed a personal vision for their lives.

We are thankful to the Women of Pearls who facilitated this summer's program bringing in enriching workshops and activities that bolstered the ladies experience and level of understanding.

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We're giving students a renewed sense of hope for their future.

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Vision Velocity

This spring we embarked on a journey to transform the mindset of our young men by challenging them to develop a vision for their lives and develop the discipline to pursue that vision. Each month featured a teaching on a specific topic that included engagement through simulations and activities around topics discussed.

The program began in May and each month covered a different topic. Some of the topics included: Considering your Latter End, Results & Responsibility, Purpose, Passion and Preparation, Discover Your Purpose.

The camaraderie that has developed between our facilitators and the young men is establishing the groundwork for great growth! Young men can sign up to attend monthly meetings by visiting our website.



Keeping Kids Safe and Having Fun

After a long season of quarantine, we were excited to partner with the Dunbar Association this summer to provide youths between 5-16 years of age, six-weeks of full-day summer camp. During their time with us students experienced vision-based learning and a taste of what the Clarence Jordan Vision Center has to offer. In addition, we invited local educators and workshop facilitators to help us take the whole summer camp experience to a new level!

Week by week there was a buzz of activities that kept students visioneering, creating, playing and having fun! Some of the workshops they experienced included Learn & Play Workshops, Yoga Workshops, Team Building Games & Simulations, Vision Velocity Intensives, Career Exploration & College Access Workshops, Physical Fitness Camps, Photography Camps, Digital Music Labs, Coding Workshops and Sketching Workshops. There was even time for a little Zumba and games with our Synergy Leadership students. Our younger students really enjoyed getting to meet and speak with our college students.

Amidst the masks, temperature logins, and social distancing, we were able to share with our young people valuable insights on vision, build relationships with them that confirmed that they are valued and just have fun with them. It was a welcomed and refreshing reprieve from a year deprived of social engagement after the pandemic.

Our commitment to engaging in programs, partnerships and projects that have a positive impact on youth is unwavering. We are so thankful to the Dunbar Association for their invitation to participate in the ‘Hello Summer’ camp experience this year.



Your Support Matters Now More Than Ever

By Joelle Harleston, Director of Development and Community Relations

MercyWorks continues its commitment to provide a healthy, safe and secure environment that encourages learning through action, inquiry and exploration around the theme of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. As a result of your support and collaboration with local leading agencies, we have made crucial imprints on the Central New York community.

Amidst a pandemic as well as national and global crises, we were able to deliver on essential programming for many students this past year. We also have been able to strengthen our capacity by working with various field experts and organizations.

We established partnerships with The Dunbar Association, Syracuse University, and Goodlife Foundation while maintaining strong collaboration with Onondaga Earth Corps, Women of Pearls and OnPoint for College, SCSD, and others. These connections have enhanced our mission to cultivate talent that our local businesses reflect.

Our diverse group of students were exposed to new concepts, activities, character, and skill development to not only enter the local job market but establish roots in Central New York and help improve our economic landscape. All of this is possible because of you.

With your help we can continue to take heart. We believe as Matthew 6:21 says “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” We invest in our students, like you, to execute programs with enhanced focus in art education as well as civic responsibility to provide career pathways and so that students will have a paid internship opportunity as well. This pandemic has highlighted that the very goal, demographic, and population we serve has been hit the hardest. The economic downturn has been unsparing.

Thank you for taking heart in the midst of so many challenges. Thank you for your investment during these uncertain times. Partnering with people like you, health experts, community leaders, job training experts and mental health specialists, has only enhanced our missional sense of urgency, but more importantly, the sense of community that our students seek.

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

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Ways to Support

You can help develop youth in our community by making a financial contribution to the Vision Center.

1. Give Online

Go to vcsyracuse.com and click the Donate button.

2. Mail a Check

Mail checks payable to
MercyWorks, Inc. at 1221 South
Salina St Syracuse, NY 13202

3. United Way

If your employer participates in the United Way fill out a form for the Donor. Option Program designating Mercy Works, Inc. as the recipient.

4. Amazon Smile

Use smile.amazon.com to donate 5% of your purchase to Mercy Works.

5. Donate a Vehicle

Do you have an excess vehicle? It's value can be donated.

6. Estate Planning

Remember us in your will and make a lasting impact.