



## Mercy Throughout the Ages: The Enduring Power of McAuley Village to Change Lives

Looking out the window of her home in Dublin, Ireland, Catherine McAuley was shocked at what she saw – mothers and their children living on the streets trying to survive. She knew, right then and there, that she needed to do something.

Using her inheritance, she built a home to not only house these women and children, but to also educate and care for them so they could live better lives. It was 1827 when Catherine opened The House of Mercy on Baggot Street and her life-changing work began.

Mercy, however, cannot be restricted to a time or place. Instead, Mercy inspires us to respond to the needs of the day. And so, when Sisters of Mercy walked the streets of Providence in the early 1990s and again saw far too many homeless mothers and children, they too, took action.

Carrying on the work of Catherine, they built McAuley Village, and over the last 30+ years, it has provided a safe and caring environment for more than 1,000 mother-led families, where moms gain the skills needed to move beyond homelessness and break the cycle of poverty.

### *The First Years*

The doors of McAuley Village opened

in 1990, greeting 23 families. To be a resident, moms were required to be in school or working, and pay a portion of their rent. And to support moms in their quest for independence, the Sisters included on-site childcare in the building... revolutionary for the time.

Maria, one of the first residents, moved to Rhode Island from Arizona at age 18, hoping for a fresh start. She was pregnant and needed help and stable housing when she found McAuley Village. She recalls,



"It was the happiest day of my life when I moved in."

Immediately, Maria set about learning the skills she needed to care for her young family. She enrolled in school, finished her GED, and later achieved a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Maria's daughter, who spent the first years of her life at McAuley Village, recently received her Master's Degree, following the example set by her mom.

*"The foundation I built at the Village has guided my entire life. I don't know where we'd be if they didn't believe in me."*

### *A New Millennium, and a New Approach*

A high school graduate who picked up part-time jobs here and there, Eve too often found herself on the cusp of crisis, struggling to make ends meet. She was able to afford an apartment, but these were the days before rental regulations, and her basement apartment was substandard with exposed wires and poor plumbing. When her son was born, she realized she could not stay there. A friend told her about McAuley Village, but the waiting list was long.

Nearly a year after applying, Eve got the call that would change her family's life – an apartment at the Village was waiting for her.

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## A Message from the Executive Director



Writing for this space to communicate directly with our amazing McAuley Ministries community remains one of the most rewarding aspects of my job. It's something I take a lot of pride in, and as I began to consider my message for this newsletter, I was struck by the phrase, "the eyes of a stranger."

During my four years as Executive Director of McAuley Ministries – and most pronounced during the recent months also filling the role of Administrator of McAuley Village – not a day has gone by without looking into the eyes of at least one stranger. I use the word 'stranger' lightly here, as they are more people I have not yet had the chance to get to know. But in those eyes, you can begin to learn so much.

As our guests and Village moms open up to share their personal stories, looking into their eyes brings me face-to-face with their worry, fear, exhaustion, anger, humor, and hope. They are right to have this myriad of pent-up emotion – life is difficult, and for those who need us most, their challenges can be difficult to fathom. Listening and being able to offer a helping hand is so powerful.

With the passage of time, I have come to know well many who were once strangers, including those who graciously – and bravely – have allowed us to share their stories in the pages that follow. They choose to share as a way to thank our donors for supporting our work.

That's because without YOU, none of what we do would be possible. It is thanks to YOU that we are making a difference in the lives of hundreds of our neighbors each and every day, helping them to endure and supporting what they need to reach their best life possible.

A biblical search for "the eyes of a stranger" reveals a number of references. And while they are all powerful, it is this one that struck me hardest. It can be found in Hebrews 13, King James Version.

*(1) Let brotherly love continue. (2) Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

Throughout 47 years of McAuley Ministries, as was the intention of our founding Sisters of Mercy, we have come to know strangers and treated all with hospitality, compassion, and respect. Thank you for your incredible support of our work.

With gratitude,

*Barbara Haynes*

She moved in, enrolled her son in the on-site childcare, and began our job-training program. Within a few short months, she landed a well-paying job at the Marriott. Today, Eve is the owner-chef of "Garden of Eve" in Providence, and celebrated her son's high school graduation this past June.

*"I'll never forget the impact that Sister Holly had on me – I could never repay her for all she did. Even after all these years, I am still in touch with her. She was such an important part of my life."*

## A Safe Haven

In a changing world, McAuley Village never stopped assessing the work needs of its mothers or the educational opportunities needed for its youngest residents. As a result, the last decade saw the introduction of on-site internships in hospitality and office administration.



*Angel enjoying the playground at McAuley Village*

And for children, a new partnership with Children's Friend – the leader in early childhood

education – brought the addition of another early head start room.

Last summer, we introduced you to Johanna and her

son, Angel, who were able to benefit from these offerings. You may recall, Anna fled hardship and violence in Guatemala, walking to the United States in a caravan with six-month-old Angel strapped to her chest. After finding her way to a sponsor family in Providence, she was introduced to McAuley Village.

Johanna excelled in her studies and was among the first moms to participate in the new internship program, gaining valuable work experience at McAuley House. She did such a great job, that when the internship finished, Johanna was offered a full-time job.

With newfound purpose, a thriving son, and an affordable apartment to call her own, Johanna embodies the life-changing power of McAuley Village and what your generous support helps to make possible.

*"Years ago, I never could have pictured the life me and Angel have now. And I owe it all to McAuley Village."*

Like Catherine McAuley did those many years ago, we looked out

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*Ethan discovering tomatoes*

## A Day on the Farm

It was a gorgeous Friday in late July when we were greeted by the wonderful volunteers at Jamestown Community Farm who had planned a day to remember for the moms and children of McAuley Village.

A bright blue sky dotted with puffy white clouds set the scene for the kids to explore the wondrous farm landscape – a stark contrast to the city streets of their typical days. They began their adventure at the chicken coop, feeding the birds a medley of corn, watermelon, and kale leftover from the farmer's market. It was an amazing sight to see the children giggle and stare in wonder as the chickens picked apart the fruit and veggies. The children even got to pet a chicken! As a farm worker held the hen,

kids discovered the wonder of its colorful and soft feathers, and were shocked to discover chicken eggs can be brown, too!

A little later, the children had the opportunity to plant seedlings of cucumbers and sunflowers. They learned the basics of how to plant and gently handle the seedlings' roots, and the importance of proper watering. Then, off in the distance, they spotted... a tractor! The kids couldn't wait to check out the "huge" engine and take turns sitting in the driver's seat.

At this point, it was time to regroup. The children sat in the shade as they took long sips of water before coloring at tables set-up especially for them. With it being time for lunch, they then

ran off to harvest lettuce, tomatoes, and peppers for a fresh salad. And for dessert – blackberries and raspberries! Additionally, bread, cookies, and lemonade were all donated by the folks at the Farm.

Leaving for the day, the children all got to go home with their own berries, cherry tomatoes, and chicken eggs for souvenirs. Once on the bus, the kids chatted away about their favorite part of the day. One young boy leapt from his seat, "When do we get to go back?!!"

On behalf of our families at McAuley Village, we extend our sincerest thanks to the generous donors whose gifts cover the costs for special enrichment activities and field trips for our Village children.



*The group visits the Jamestown Community Farm.*



*Children receive instruction and a lesson on how plants grow and how to plant seedlings.*



## The Warde-robe's Community Blessings

For more than 25 years, low-income individuals and families across Central Falls and its neighboring communities have turned to The Warde-robe Thrift Shop Ministries for essential items. It was opened by Sisters of Mercy, Alberic Martin and Lois Harten. And while much has changed since 1996, it remains as true to its mission as ever.

Just as it was the day it opened, the store offers donated, gently-used clothing and household items to those on tight budgets. It is a beacon of dignity, compassion, and hospitality to all who enter its doors.



*The Warde-robe's staff and dedicated volunteers*



*Lisa (right) Melissa (left)*

Two community members who help expand The Warde-robe's reach are Melissa Flaherty and Lisa Young, who is a Case Manager and Peer Outreach Specialist with Project Weber/Renew.

This November marks Lisa's seventh year with the organization, which is one of Providence's most influential nonprofits working to provide harm reduction, overdose prevention, and recovery services.

Lisa used to be a homeless addict, living on the streets until Project Weber/Renew helped her to begin her recovery journey and create a better life. "Someone took the time to stop and help me," she says. "They saved my life, so I want to do the same for others."

Even when she's not 'working,' Lisa is working, offering others support and rides to necessary appointments, and to shop at The Warde-robe. She shares vouchers from The Warde-robe that she distributes to those who are struggling. Recently, she was awarded a citation from the City of Pawtucket Mayor's Office, recognizing her hard work and service on behalf of the underserved in the community.

The Warde-robe is blessed to have the support of these two women and the many other dedicated volunteers and donors who promote mercy in our community, just as Catherine McAuley intended.

## Catherine's Corner



*A statue of Catherine McAuley at the entrance to St. Mary Academy-Bay View.*

**"Be sure you have a comfortable cup of tea for them when I'm gone."**

These were the last words uttered by Catherine McAuley in her final moments. She was concerned, not about the pain she felt or the fear of leaving this world, but for the comforting and merciful care she knew others still needed. In death, just as in life, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy served as a beacon to all who might carry on her ministry of caring for the most vulnerable.

We may sometimes feel the need is overwhelming and our efforts are but a tiny pebble in a lake. Like a cup of tea, serving lunch to a guest will not chase away their hunger forever. Rather the power to change lives lies in the simple gesture itself. Providing a plate of nutritious food, offering an air conditioner, and donating clothes are simple acts of kindness that make mercy concrete. Such actions are an acknowledgment of another's need and our active response to that need. So in the tradition of Catherine, serve that cup of tea wherever you go and you will be steeping the world in mercy.

# Meet Chris: The Life of the Unsheltered

Chris was living what many would consider the American Dream. He had a family and a nice house, and had been working as a welder for General Dynamics Electric Boat for more than ten years. He seemed to have it all... a solid job... a comfortable bed to sleep in at night... and food to eat when he wanted it. Life was good, until everything came to a screeching halt when Chris lost his job. It began a downward spiral.

No longer able to put food on the table or pay his mortgage, Chris found himself homeless with nothing but some clothes and his truck. He spent his days scouring the city for work, food, and a place to stay. Uncomfortable with the thought of staying at a homeless shelter, Chris would take refuge in his truck as night fell, parking at the Pocasset Cemetery in Cranston.

Chris would learn about McAuley House through a mutual friend and began coming each day for lunch. As he became more comfortable, Chris started to utilize the many services we have to offer. He would receive homeless survival bags, filled with on-the-go foods, toiletries, gloves and a hat, and modest clothing items. On Fridays, we provide him with extra food to help get him through the weekend.

With the help of our Social Services team, Chris was introduced

to some of our neighboring meal sites and service providers such as Shower to Empower so he could receive additional supports. When you're living in your vehicle, every bit helps. And when he can afford gas, Chris will drive around and pick up scrap metal, selling it for gas money and the occasional special meal, like Subway.

Chris is unsure what comes next. He jokes about one day winning Powerball, but in the next breath admits it's tough to win when you can't buy a ticket. He's working with a case manager to complete his housing application, and knows he faces an uphill battle because of some poor choices he made in the past. But for now, he continues to build his life living unsheltered, grateful for the compassionate support he receives at McAuley House.

It is thanks to the generosity of our donors that we are able to provide food and other basic needs to Chris, and we pray he reaches his goal of a future stable life.



## Celebrating our Amazing Donors and Volunteers

On the evening of September 8, the McAuley House backyard was transformed for a reception to honor the volunteers and donors who generously give their time and treasure in support of our ministries.

Hosted by the McAuley Ministries Board of Trustees, the celebration began with guests enjoying a special cocktail reception and crudité table while listening to the joyful music performed by one of our volunteers, Pastor Mike Lembke, and our very own Marlene Schuster. As guests mingled,

members of the Saint Paul Church confirmation program passed delectable hors d'oeuvres prepared by McAuley House Chef MaryEllen Leonhardt and Kitchen Manager Larry Loverde. Yvette Kenner, the Administrator of McAuley House, offered words of gratitude to the group for all they do to bring dignity and hospitality to guests. McAuley Ministries' Executive Director, Barbara Haynes, shared important updates on a range of ministry programs that continue to reach out into our community with mercy to help our

most vulnerable neighbors.

The entire McAuley Ministries family extends its thanks to the many in-kind donors whose contributions helped to make this year's Donor and Volunteer Appreciation Event particularly special, including Exquisite Events, the Saint Paul Church confirmation program, and Pastor Mike Lembke. Thank you to all who attended, and God Bless you for everything you do for McAuley Ministries and those who depend on us.



## Meets Johanna Hernandez: *Guest Services and Kitchen Assistant Extraordinaire*

You may recall first meeting Johanna Hernandez when you read her story in a past newsletter as she shared of how she came to live at McAuley Village and work at McAuley House. Now one year later, we are eager to highlight more of the impact McAuley Ministries has had on Johanna and her son – a difference made possible in large part by our generous donors.

No longer as shy as when she first came to The Village, Johanna has become confident in everything she does. She is comfortable in her still new surroundings and in her ability to communicate in English. She is the first one to help with anything that needs to be done. And she is succeeding in her role as Guest Services and Kitchen Assistant at McAuley House and as a tremendous resource for our guests.

At our recent Volunteer & Donor Appreciation Event, Johanna's words touched everyone in attendance.

"When I started this job before, I thought it was too hard for me. The people who come to McAuley House sometimes have many problems. Sometimes, they would talk about bad things and I would cry because it was hard for me. But now I think about that person who needs help and love, and that is why I like to work here. I get nervous sometimes because of different cultures. But Ms. Barbara and Ms. Michele and you have gave me a very good opportunity."

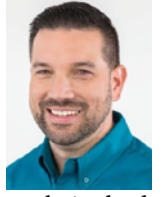
– Johanna Hernandez



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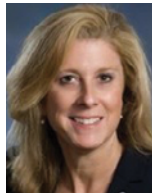
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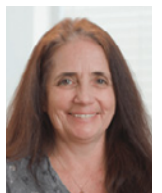
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**“I just want to give back.  
The Village has given me and  
my children back our lives.”**



*Dana and family*

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## **2020: A New Chapter and Limitless Possibilities**

the window to respond to the needs of today as we have done for 30 years.

Seeing the growing numbers of victims of domestic violence and the tremendous need they have for a safe and caring environment, the Village began a new partnership with Sojourner House in 2021, further strengthening our abilities and embodiment of Mercy. Specially-trained counselors make on-site visits, children participate in art therapy on a weekly basis ... all within the comforting walls of McAuley Village.

One of the moms referred by Sojourner House is Dana.

Dana was forced into an arranged marriage, giving up a promising career in engineering to tend to everything at home. She gave birth to a beautiful daughter, but in a culture where boys are the prized children and a baby's gender is determined by the mother, Dana's husband began physically abusing her.

With no way out, Dana had no choice but to stay. When her second daughter was born with a disability, her husband shunned the child and wanted her abandoned. Dana refused, and the beatings escalated. Family and friends turned a blind eye.

Scared for her life and that of her girls, Dana snuck out in the middle of the night and hid on the streets until making her way to Sojourner House. From there, she moved into the Village.

**“I cried when I saw my apartment. It was fully furnished, even down to the small things like a coffee maker. But more than anything, I felt safe.”**

Dana's daughters are doing well and learning new things each day. As for Dana, she is working on her citizenship and recently secured her working papers. She volunteers at the Village while searching for a job, beautifying bulletin boards, sorting donations, and helping with mailings.

**“I just want to give back. The Village has given me and my children back our lives.”**

## **Our Successes are Your Successes**

Never for a moment do we forget the incredible difference that your generous support has on making these life-changing stories possible. For it is your continued, compassionate support that drives our work and provides hope to those who need it most.

Over the years, our moms have gotten their GEDs, CDAs, and graduated from colleges. They have become dental assistants and hygienists, nurses, business owners, medical technicians, social workers, EMTs, and more. Their children have bounced in their own bouncy house, held bunnies and chinchillas, gone to camp, felt the true love of a Village, and so much more. Many of them are now parents themselves.

As we look ahead, wherever Mercy leads us in the future, Catherine's ministry will continue through the work of McAuley Ministries and your generous support.



## Your kindness changes lives. Support McAuley Ministries today.



*A family grateful for the help they needed  
to rent their new apartment.*



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for a portion of your purchases  
to be donated to us

### Volunteer your time at any of our ministries

Donate non-perishable  
food items to our pantry

Donate clothing and small  
household items to  
The Warde-robe