



2023

Mercy Learning Center

End-of-Year Report



MERCY
LEARNING
CENTER

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Introduction

July 2023--Entering our 37th year of operation in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Mercy Learning Center empowers low-income women, the majority of whom speak English as a second language, through education that is delivered within a time-tested and holistic social services model.

By learning how to read and speak English, improving their basic academic skills, obtaining their high school equivalency, and/or becoming United States citizens, our students will go on to advocate for themselves and their families, obtain jobs with higher wages, pursue secondary education, and independently navigate community resources.

Our wraparound approach to adult education makes it possible for our students to progress despite the extraordinary life challenges they typically face!

When a woman enrolls at Mercy Learning Center, we:

- Assess each student's unique needs and goals;
- Develop an academic program tailored to each student, measuring their progress throughout the year;
- Address barriers to learning so students can focus on achieving their academic and career goals.

Our Support Services meet the basic life needs of our students and include: college and career counseling, case worker support, emergency financial assistance, a food and diaper pantry, free childcare and preschool, citizenship preparation, and more.

Education empowers our students to transform their lives. When Mercy Learning Center students realize what they are truly capable of achieving, anything is possible!

Wonderfully Diverse Students

- Our students during the 2022/2023 school year came from 45 different countries and speak 17 languages!
- Our youngest student was 17 years old and our oldest was 85. More than 70% of our students fall between the ages of 17 and 44.
- 60% of our students are mothers who have children 18 years old and younger.
- Many of them work one, two, or sometimes even three jobs in addition to coming to class.
- 73% of our students live in poverty, and nearly all of the remaining 27% live in ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households, as defined by the United Way. While they might earn just above the poverty level, they cannot afford the basics of housing, child care, food transportation, health care and technology.



**Mercy Learning
Center served
684 women
and children
during the
2022/2023
school year.**

Regardless of their life circumstances, Mercy Learning Center students are committed to their education, and we are with them every step of the way.

Small (yet mighty) wins.

61 percent of our students attended our English As A Second Language (ESL) program. Activities and tasks that are basic to most native-born Americans are triumphs for immigrant women who do not speak English as their primary language. Here are some powerful examples of life-changing wins our students achieved after starting to learn English:



Eva

is from Guatemala and is 20 years old. This year she was able to apply for and obtain her driver's license.



Karla

is from South Africa and is 31 years old. She set up her first gmail account and can now confidently look and apply for work online.



Rosa

is from Ecuador and is 65 years old. Speaking to neighbors used to make her nervous. Now, she is comfortable saying hello and having a friendly exchange.

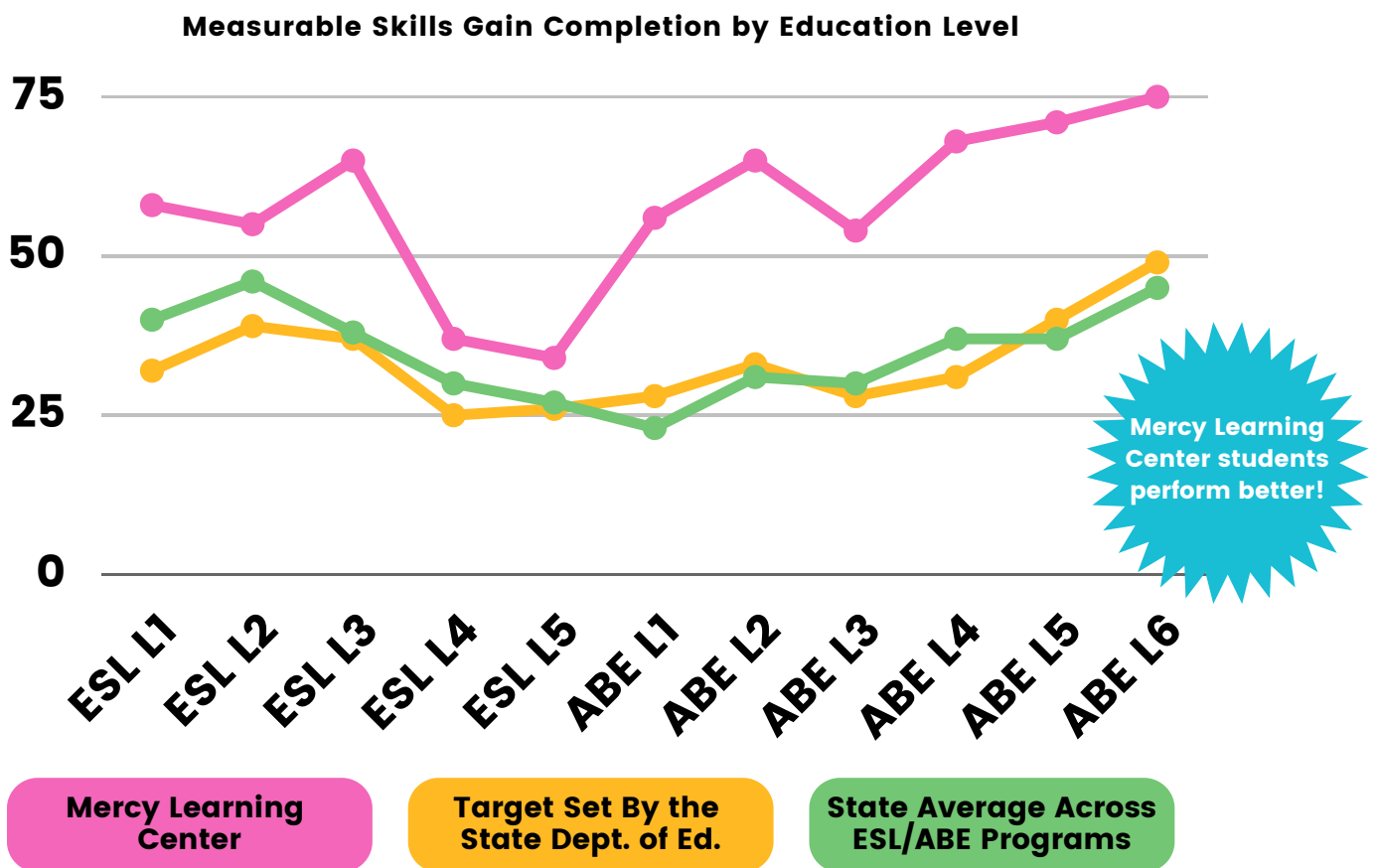


Mary

is from Peru and is 40 years old. Her child has special needs. Mary's improved English empowered her to effectively participate in a parent/teacher conference.

Measuring Our Progress

The Connecticut Department of Education sets a target each year for the percentage of adult education students who achieve a 'measurable skill gain' in the different levels of English As A Second Language (ESL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs.



"Mercy Learning Center is a model we often use as an example of best practices in adult education. Not only has MLC demonstrated outstanding efforts toward retention of students and the overall performance of students, but they have remarkably scored at the top of the state.



Sabrina Mancini, State Director
Connecticut State Department of Education

The Power of Education

As our students learn more English they are able to advance to learn basic reading, writing, and math skills. They can take advantage of our career and college counseling, life skills, and high school equivalency programs.

Our individualized and holistic approach to education is essential to our impact. We enable women to dream and succeed, while understanding that they arrive at the Center accompanied by tremendous challenges. The combination of quality adult education and support services empowers our students and graduates to achieve goals previously unimaginable.

12

women earned high school diplomas

14

women earned a master's degree, bachelor's degree, associates degree or career certification

64

women were enrolled in post-secondary education programs

78

women found jobs

155

women received 1:1 career counseling

500+

women attended our life skills workshops on topics such as budgeting, avoiding scams, CPR, voter education, and more

We Knock Down Barriers to Learning

Women with unmet basic needs cannot focus on educational success. To address this, our students have access to a comprehensive suite of support services—all at no cost to them. This differentiates Mercy Learning Center from other Fairfield County organizations—and most other Connecticut organizations—that provide literacy education.

A food and diaper pantry, case workers, licensed child care/preschool, legal counsel, and citizenship assistance are available on site. Students are encouraged to share challenges with staff so that barriers can be addressed.

Consistent attendance and graduation are more likely due to the fact that students can walk downstairs for support rather than follow a referral across town.

To date we have empowered more than 16,800 women with education and cared for thousands of their children.



**We provided
106 children
ages 3 months
to 5 years with
more than
30,000 hours of
educational
childcare
services.**

In Victoria's Words

Victoria is a Mercy Learning Center graduate and was the speaker at our End-of-Year Celebration. This is her story of empowerment.

My name is Victoria. I'm from Honduras and a mom of three. I graduated from Mercy Learning Center in 2019. I'm currently a student at Housatonic Community College.

I arrived in the U.S. in 2005. In my country, there is a big lack of education and opportunities. When I was a child, I did not have the opportunity to go to school because I started to work at an incredibly early age to help my parents. When I came to this country, it was so hard for me to adapt to all the new living standards. One of my first challenges was not speaking English.

It was so frustrating and sad to see how I could not communicate with anybody. Until I learned about Mercy Learning Center and enrolled in the Intensive Study Program.

Since I found Mercy, I have loved learning and improving my English skills. The biggest lesson that I have learned from Mercy is to persevere, never give up, and to always try my best.

Mercy Learning has been one of the biggest gifts I have ever received in my life.

After attending Mercy, I was able to support my kids with their homework and I was confident when talking with their teachers, at medical appointments and more. It has taught me so many things that I will forever treasure in my heart. It taught me the true value of education,

leadership, and self-confidence. Mercy Learning Center opened so many doors in my educational path. I spent 3 and ½ years learning and improving my English until

I graduated in 2019. I received my High School Diploma in 2020 and got into Housatonic Community College.

My major is Human Services and I am on track to earn my Associate's degree in 2025. One of my goals is to earn a Bachelor's degree and become a social worker. I want to be able to help my family and community and give back to those people that have given to me.

I will tell you the journey is not easy but it also not impossible if you have the dream in your heart. If you have found Mercy, it's because you have a purpose already. You have to feed that dream and make it come true. You have to be completely sure and confident in yourself.

Make education and this dream worth it for you and your family.



**Thank you for your
continued support of our efforts to
'Educate A Woman...Educate A Family'!**

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