



MERCY
LEARNING
CENTER

ANNUAL REPORT
2023-2024



ELEVATE.

EDUCATE.

EMPOWER.



“Whoever crosses through the MLC doors is reborn a new woman: empowerment with grammar, technology, knowledge - and led by brave women. One thing I know, I will be part of MLC forever, and MLC will be part of me forever.”

- Cristina, Student

LETTER FROM CEO & BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends,

The women of Mercy Learning Center arrive at our doors for many different and challenging reasons. For a woman who does not speak English, she comes to us to communicate effectively with her doctor or grocer. For a woman who is seeking a higher paying job, she comes to us to achieve her high school diploma. For a woman who is new to our country, she is looking for ways to assimilate into her community. Regardless of our students' reasons for enrolling in classes at Mercy Learning Center, we work to **elevate** them to achieve their dreams.

Every day at Mercy Learning Center, we work with women and children of all backgrounds and experiences. While our adult students are learning and growing, their young children can learn and grow as well. From our smallest students who are only a few months old in this world, to our preschoolers who are preparing to succeed in English-dominant kindergarten, we are here for everyone. We break cycles of poverty. We build stronger families. At MLC we don't just provide education to a woman, we **educate** a family.

Every woman has the right to an education, to fulfillment, and to empowerment. Barriers to education come in many forms from financial or housing insecurity, to a lack of transportation and quality, affordable childcare. We work with our students to identify and address these barriers so that they can focus on their studies and reach their goals. It is because of your generosity that we continue to **empower** women every day - to dream more, learn more, do more, and achieve more.

Every year, hundreds of students come to MLC with a common goal: to transform their lives through education. And every day we are inspired and humbled by their determination, strength, and resilience.

A cornerstone of our work is offering our programs and services at no cost to our students. To do that, we rely on the support of foundations, corporations, organizations, and individuals like you. As you read on, we hope you will be inspired by the work that we can do because of **you**.

ELEVATE. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.



Lindsay Wyman

Lindsay Wyman
PRESIDENT & CEO



E. W. Speer

Eric Speer
CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Adult Education Program

MEBRIHIT'S STORY

Navigating your child's schooling can be challenging. Imagine doing that when you don't speak or understand the language. This is what led Mebrihit to Mercy Learning Center. Born in Eritrea, an African country with a similar population size as the state of Connecticut, Mebrihit immigrated to the United States from a refugee camp at the age of 33. She didn't speak, write, or understand any English. In Eritrea, children are only required to go to school until age 13, and Mebrihit didn't have much education there or in the Ethiopian refugee camp where she lived for many years. She came to the United States for better schooling and a better life. She came to this country with drive, determination, and her family – a husband and 4 sons.

When they first settled here, her sons were in school and, like all kids, needed help with homework. But Mebrihit didn't understand what they were doing in school. She attended parent teacher conferences but didn't understand the grades or the work. Report cards were a complete mystery to her. After 5 years at MLC Mebrihit says, "I understand what they do now". Now she knows that she wants to see A+s on their report cards. She understands the teachers and enjoys helping her sons (she now has 5!) with homework, especially in her favorite subject - math. Her sons help her as well. Every day she asks her sons to practice English with her for 10 minutes each, and she insists on English being spoken at home so that she can learn more.

Two of Mebrihit's sons have graduated high school, both in the top of their class – one was even valedictorian! Now they attend Wesleyan and Stanford University with the same strong work ethic as their mom. Mebrihit is enrolled in the Intensive Study program at Mercy Learning Center where she studies 5 days a week for 5 hours a day. She wants to improve her English language abilities even further, and then thinks it will not be so difficult to obtain her high school diploma. Her husband works and attends community college while her youngest 3 sons are in local schools. Mebrihit's family is built on a foundation of love and support with a strong emphasis on education and the doors a quality education can open.



ELEVATE.

"Education is the most important thing in life!"

- Mebrihit, Student



"I really like coming here and I feel that I learn and it's very good for my daughters to share with other children. I'm very happy."

- Rosaurys, Student

Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP)

Nationwide, students in adult education struggle to attend classes because of a lack of access to childcare for their young children. At Mercy Learning Center, we offer a solution for that core issue for many of our students. And what we offer here at MLC is not daycare, it is education.

Early childhood education is a crucial aspect of a child's development, leading to gains in school readiness skills, social-emotional, and behavioral development prior to their K-12 school years. MLC's programming is based on consistent daily routines and a CTEDLS (Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards) and Creative curriculum. CTEDLS focuses on cognitive, physical, social-emotional, and language development. It's supported by science, math, social studies and creative art. Our emphasis on research-backed early childhood education ensures our young learners begin Kindergarten on par with or above their peers whose first language is English.

While the lessons vary by age group, there is a routine cadence to the day to help children transition from home to the classroom knowing what to expect every day. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers all begin the day with a classroom community circle time. They review the day of the week, the weather, and sing songs to practice essential rhyming and listening skills. Music, sensory activities, art, and reading are part of each day as we promote learning and problem-solving through a creative lens. The highlight of everyone's day is at least 45 minutes of outside play on our new, state-of-the-art playground.

By having their child(ren) in our Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP), moms in our adult education program can focus on their studies knowing that their child is thriving in a warm, loving environment curated by our phenomenal ECEP staff. When our preschoolers graduate, they are ready to thrive in English-dominant kindergarten classrooms and beyond.

EDUCATE.

Social Services

When people exist in survival mode, they do not have sufficient capacity to learn and grow. For many MLC students, **75% of whom live below the poverty line**, survival mode means constant worries about safe and affordable housing, regular access to healthy food, transportation to school, and adequate medical care. When utility shutoffs, lack of transportation, and food insecurity are a grim reality, students are often faced with a difficult choice - continue their education at MLC and risk eviction? Or leave school to work more hours and try to make ends meet?

At MLC, we empower our students to access the resources needed to break down barriers that are roadblocks to our students accessing their education. For the hundreds of students who need support providing food for themselves and their families, our free food and diaper pantry, and regular donations of fresh produce, help alleviate the burden of food insecurity. For the dozens of students unable to make rent and utility payments, emergency financial assistance helps them to find stability in a consistent place to live. For the 200 MLC students without a reliable way to get to our center for class each week, receiving city bus passes for the school year ensures they can maintain regular attendance.

WHY IT MATTERS

For Irene, receiving housing support from MLC means she is now re-enrolled in classes after having to quit 2 years ago to be able to afford rent for herself and her 3 children. For Martha, being able to send her children to summer camp at no cost to her meant she could enroll in summer classes, furthering her goal of attaining her GED. For all our students, knowing that our social services team is here to share their challenges in a safe, non-judgmental environment means that they can prioritize their education.

EMPOWER.



“I became a whole different person, someone who is not afraid anymore and feels so proud of herself and the ability to come this far.”

- Miriam, Student

Our Programs



Literacy & Life Skills Program

We provide our students the opportunity to learn English, acquire basic academic skills, become active members of their community, earn a high school equivalency diploma, and obtain their first job and/or employment with higher wages. It is open to women of all backgrounds and all services are free.

The Literacy & Life Skills core curriculum includes English Language Learning (ELL) classes, Adult Basic Education classes (ABE), computer classes and enrichment workshops. Our dedicated staff is comprised of certified paid teachers and highly trained volunteer tutors.

We offer full-time and part-time sessions, and students often move back and forth between the two depending on their needs, and the needs of their families, at any point in time. The amount of time a student spends at MLC also varies greatly. While one student might be with us for six months, another might be with us for six years, or even longer!



Support Services

When external stressors and barriers arise that affect a student's ability to succeed, our comprehensive support services are there for them, 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 childcare/preschool, career and college counseling, citizenship assistance, referrals for legal and medical services, and much more are available on site. Students are encouraged to share challenges with staff early and often so that barriers can be addressed as we are able. Consistent attendance and graduation are more likely because our students have essential support in the same building where they attend class.



High School Equivalency Programs

We offer two options to secure a high school equivalency diploma.

Our certified teachers help students prepare for and take the General Educational Development (GED®) test. This program covers all four test subjects: Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies.

National External Diploma Program (NEDP®) gives adults the opportunity to demonstrate high school-level skills through completing a portfolio of life skills and academic tasks, anywhere they have access to the Internet. It evaluates reading, writing, math and workforce-readiness skills with real-world relevance.



Early Childhood Education Program

MLC embraces a holistic approach to removing hurdles to our adult students' success, and providing free, high-quality childcare and preschool is a cornerstone of our proven wraparound support system. Our student mothers are best able to focus on their own education when they know their children are being cared for, in the same building, while learning and playing in the nurturing environment of our Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP).

Children who attend ECEP receive support starting at 3 months of age through five years, in our compassionate and stimulating learning environments that are critical for kindergarten readiness in English-dominant classrooms. Mercy Learning Center's continuum of free infant care, toddler care, and preschool programming of the highest quality distinguishes it from other childcare organizations in Greater Bridgeport.

Mothers and children in our full-time program are part of our weekly Mother-Child Reading Program to promote family literacy. Participants meet in group settings with teachers to read aloud, review parenting topics, and receive books to take home to continue learning as a family.

Our Impact

In the 2023-2024 school year:

10

women became **US Citizens**

6

women received **driver's licenses/driving permits**

47

women obtained **new jobs**

2

women received **job promotions**

22

women earned their **high school diploma**

3

women registered **to vote**

49

women enrolled in **post-secondary education**

6

women earned **higher education (Associate's and Bachelor's) degrees**

Ava is 39 years old and from Turkey. After obtaining her U.S. citizenship the year before, she has now become a **registered voter**.

Dora is 50 years old and from Mexico. She achieved her dream of obtaining a **high school diploma** and **getting a job at a bank**.

MERCY LEARNING CENTER

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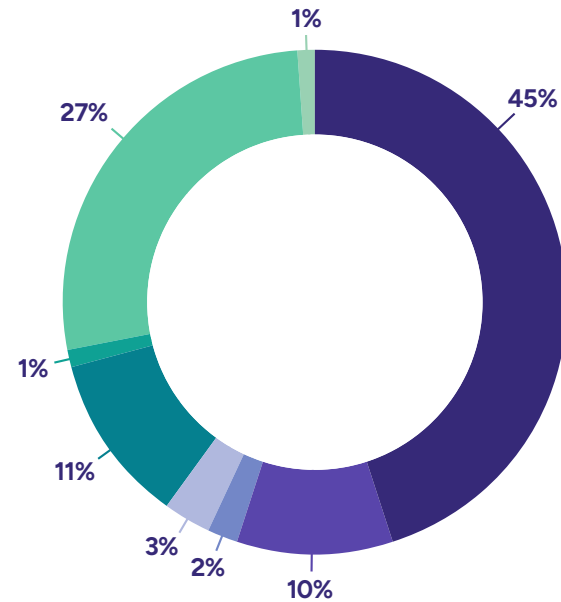
May is 38 years old. She is from the Dominican Republic and has 3 kids. She graduated from MLC with her **GED** after 1 year and is now **employed full-time**.

Sasha is from Columbia and is 29 years old. This year she obtained her **U.S. driver's license**.

Financial Summary

SUPPORT & REVENUE

● Individual Donations	\$2,219,436
● Private Donations	\$500,197
● In-Kind Donations	\$104,530
● Government Grants	\$152,356
● Corporate Donations	\$545,350
● Local Organizations	\$50,784
● Investment Gain	\$1,341,660
● Realized & Unrealized Gain on Beneficial Interest	\$2,983
● TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE	\$4,917,296



EXPENSES

● Program	\$2,637,361
● Management & General	\$575,127
● Fundraising	\$310,237
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$3,522,725

● Program | 75% ● Management | 16% ● Fundraising | 9%



Mercy Learning Center has received a **4-Star rating** for sound fiscal management, commitment to accountability, and transparency from Charity Navigator for the tenth consecutive year. MLC also holds the Platinum Level rating from Candid.



Audited financial statements and IRS 900 Report are available at: www.mercylearningcenter.org

Ways to Give

When you support Mercy Learning Center, you are giving the gift of education.

Education is the key to a better life. Your gift allows a woman to make immediate changes in her life and also opens new possibilities for her future and the future of her family.

MAIL YOUR DONATION

Giving to Mercy Learning Center monthly is a great way to support women's education. As a sustaining donor, you'll be helping to ensure the sustainability of the Center while saving yourself time. Just set it and forget it!

PLANNED GIVING

With planned giving, you are establishing a donation that will be given at a later time. By planning to support MLC in the future, you help ensure that we continue to educate and empower women and families. Planned giving can also provide financial benefits to you and your family now and in the future.

STOCK OUR PANTRIES

Your gifts of food, diapers, and other daily necessities support the women at Mercy Learning Center so that they can stay in school. Review our Wishlist on page 23 to see what items we currently need most and consider donating or coordinating a collection drive.

SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT

College is a tremendous opportunity for the women who graduate from MLC, but it can also be a significant financial hardship. MLC provides scholarship funding to qualified graduates to ensure that they can continue on their educational path. You can help a woman achieve her dream of attending college by donating to our Women of Achievement Scholarship Fund. Call us at 203-334-6699 to learn more.

EMPLOYER GIVING PROGRAMS

Enroll in your employer's charitable match program and double the impact of every gift you make. Many employers also offer a pre-tax automatic payroll deduction donation program. Inquire at work today!



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Reflects total gifts dated July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

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WISHLIST

We strive to offer our women a holistic array of services, as we understand how many different roles our students play. Our free food and diaper pantry is one of the first steps towards supporting their needs.

Review our Wishlist to see what items we currently need most and consider donating or coordinating a collection drive. You can also donate via Amazon by scanning the QR code. **Your support is appreciated!**



“Things changed when MLC taught me that the first step was to make myself a priority and to be kind to myself. My life was transformed by attending MLC and by obtaining my diploma through the NEDP. I became a whole different person...It wasn't an easy path and there were many days that I doubted myself. However, because of the amazing people that worked at MLC, I always gave it one more try and look where I am now – writing my graduate reflection. While I'm writing, tears of joy shed down my face.”

- Daviela, Student



Scan to Watch Video

To hear from more of our students, watch our video!



Stock Our Pantries

**Bold is highest priority*

NON-PERISHABLES

- Rice (Individual Packages)
- Cooking Oil**
- Dried Beans
- Pasta Sauce
- Peanut Butter
- Jelly
- Cereal
- Oatmeal
- Apple Sauce

CANNED GOODS

- Chicken
- Spam
- Broth
- Tomato Sauce**
- Vegetables

BABY ITEMS

- Diapers (Size 5 & 6 Only)**
- Baby Wipes**
- Pediasure

TOILETRIES

- Conditioner
- Toothpaste
- Sanitary Pads
- Dish Soap
- Soap/Body Wash**
- Lotion
- Detergent
- Washcloths
- Tylenol
- Deodorant



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