



Women's Housing & Economic Development Corporation

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URBAN HORIZONS

Issue 7

Back to School 2008

WHEDCo's HEAD START PROGRAM RISES TO THE TOP OF THE CLASS!

After an intensive two year evaluation process, WHEDCo's Early Childhood Discovery Center Head Start has become **one of the first programs in the nation** to earn accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the nation's leading organization of early childhood professionals, under their newly revised more stringent standards.

Through an extensive review process and site observations, WHEDCo's Head Start Center, now in its 10th year, has become nationally accredited through the program that the Wall Street Journal calls the "gold standard" for early childhood education.



Children enjoy a healthy meal and reading in WHEDCo's newly accredited Head Start Center.



"We are thrilled to have earned the highest mark of quality in early childhood education from NAEYC, and are proud to be recognized as a leader in a national effort to provide tremendous early childhood education," said WHEDCo's Head Start Center program director, Rose Rivera.



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WHEDCo YOUTH PROGRAMS RECEIVE CITYWIDE AWARDS

WHEDCo's award-winning Youth Enrichment programs continue to thrive and now serve over 900 students at neighboring PS/MS 218, PS 2/63, located near our newest affordable apartment development - Intervale Green - and at summer camp.

WHEDCo's Project STEP earned two Teen Action Awards for the Highest Rate of Participation at 100% and the Longest Running Program.

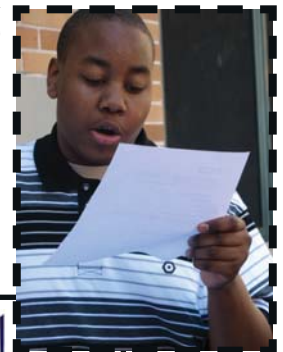
This year our decade-old teen program was selected to be part of Mayor Bloomberg's Teen Action Service Learning initiative to help build leadership skills, promote civic engagement, and foster personal responsibility. WHEDCo received two Teen Action Awards for having the

highest rate of participation, at 100%, and for being the longest running program of the 60 youth programs participating in Teen Action this year.

WHEDCo's Research and Evaluation Department reported similar success of our middle school-high school Project STEP.

Our study revealed that, compared to only 50% of students in equivalent programs, 79 - 84% of the students in WHEDCo's program attend at least three times per week. When compared to only 60% of students at-

tending similar programs, 87 - 96% of WHEDCo's students return to Project STEP from one year to the next.



A Project STEP student prepares for a presentation at the student-led Teen Health Fair.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

I'm delighted to share with you some news from WHEDCo. It is an unusually exciting time: accolades and awards for our Head Start and After School programs; a great partnership with the NYC Department of Health that is bringing exercise and fitness into all of our lives; a stellar research and development department that is not only documenting our program outcomes, but also conducting sophisticated neighborhood assessments so that our work continues to dovetail with the hopes and dreams of the Bronx.

As the election season unfolds, we intend to participate in the national conversation. The challenges that have confounded the Bronx for decades have now crossed state lines, overwhelming millions of Americans. Economic pain and insecurity are no longer confined to pockets of poverty. At WHEDCo, we are demonstrating- through hard work, study, and evaluation- what it takes to create authentic change among individuals and within our neighborhoods. Revitalizing a distressed community requires respect for its history and culture coupled with innovative and integrated solutions that promote economic opportunity.

Stay tuned for news about the opening of our new green housing development, Intervale Green, and the expansion of our home-based childcare training throughout the Bronx. Enjoy this exciting autumn.

Warm wishes,

Nancy
Nancy

HEAD START ACCREDITATION CONTINUED

NAEYC's extensive review process looked at every facet of WHEDCo's program, from the level of staff expertise and board oversight to examining every lesson plan and pencil point.

WHEDCo's Head Start program was recognized by NAEYC for promoting positive relationships among children and adults, implementing a curriculum that encourages exceptional learning and development, using developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate teaching practices, and maintaining collaborative relationships with each child's family.

WHEDCo's Head Start program serves 104 pre-schoolers from 18 countries offering a safe, nurturing and activity-rich learning environment.

Parents participate in English Language and family development classes through our Family Literacy program. Teachers from Literacy Partners offer three and a half hour sessions, four times a week, with packed class-



WHEDCo's Head Start program promotes active play and increased physical movement among pre-schoolers.

rooms of 25 parents.

It's no wonder these classrooms are always full; that families return year after year (until, of course, kindergarten beckons) and siblings follow them!

WHEDCo's HEAD START BY THE NUMBERS

this year we served

104 pre-schoolers and their families

from

18 different countries

representing

11 different languages

"BURN CALORIES, NOT ELECTRICITY!"

In an effort to trim waistlines and energy costs, this past summer Urban Horizon residents and WHEDCo staff stepped it up by "Taking the Stairs!"

WHEDCo and the Department of Health hosted a July kick-off event at Urban Horizons as part of a campaign to promote stair usage in buildings across the City. At the event residents received pedometers, coupons for free food at local farmers markets, and bike helmets



A young Urban Horizon resident is fitted for a free bike helmet by Department of Transportation worker.

courtesy of the New York City Department of Transportation.

"Taking the stairs is a great example of how staying fit can be a simple part of your everyday life," said Dr. Karen Lee, the Health Department's Deputy Director for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control. "With their commitment to community health and environmentally-friendly housing development, WHEDCo emerged as an ideal partner for this project."

As part of the new campaign, signs throughout the building in English and Spanish urge residents to "Burn Calories, Not Electricity" and take the stairs!

SPOTLIGHT: JORDAN GUERRA

Nineteen year old Jordan Guerra, a junior at the State University of New York at Albany, joined WHEDCo's research team this past summer. Jordan knows WHEDCo from the inside out, having moved into Urban Horizons from the shelter system with his family when he was entering 4th-grade.



Jordan joined WHEDCo's After School program in its very first year and quite literally grew up with the program. Each summer he attended WHEDCo's Summer Camp and later on, the Teen program. Over the years, Jordan joined the Youth staff as both a volunteer and part-time employee at After School and Summer Camp.

"Jordan always had a ton of energy and I remember the struggle of getting him to sit down to do his homework in those early years," recalls Davon Russell, WHEDCo's Vice President for Programs, who directed the Youth Program in its early years. "He's always been a good kid, driven, kind-hearted - he is a real part of the WHEDCo family."

Hired as this past summer's research intern, Jordan was thrilled to hit the streets to help evaluate the needs of his neighborhood alongside Dr. Reitman.

"The opportunity to work at WHEDCo was just magnificent to me," explained Jordan. "WHEDCo's had my back since I was young. If I had it my way I'd be VP in a couple of years. I love this organization. I love what they do."

Jordan will return to his studies this fall and plans to pursue a career in marketing upon graduation.

Read more about Jordan's story online at www.whedco.org/jordan

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT MORE HEALTHY, PROSPEROUS LIVES?

If everyone knows that exercise and physical fitness are an important part of staying healthy, why are many New Yorkers so sedentary?

Faced with statistics showing that 39% of adult residents in the South Bronx get no exercise at all, WHEDCo's Research & Development Department, headed by Dr. Meredith Reitman, has designed the first ever Community Fitness Awareness and Assessment designed to take the "fitness pulse" of the Highbridge/Morrisania community.

The survey will evaluate awareness of the benefits of physical fitness, describe existing community engagement in physical activity, and identify barriers to fitness. Dr. Reitman and her staff are also evaluating the relationship between the neighborhood's built environment and

physical exercise through field observations.

Under Dr. Reitman's guidance, summer intern Jordan Guerra has been leading the street team assessments this past summer.

"Since I've been working on the built environment evaluation, I've started noticing things I never noticed before," said Jordan, "such as if there is a speed limit, or a bike lane, or cracks in the sidewalk. Are there air conditioners spilling water on the sidewalk, making it too slippery for people to walk through?"

Once the survey analysis and evaluation are complete, WHEDCo will share findings with resi-

Face the Facts:

39% of South Bronx adult residents report getting no exercise at all.

43% of South Bronx high schoolers are not getting enough exercise.

Source: NYC Dept of Health

dents, community partners, funders and supporters. Together we will create a roadmap for improving physical health specifically targeted to the needs and resources of the community.

WHEDCo is a proud member of the NYC Food & Fitness Partnership, a collaboration of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, the New York City Health Department, the City Council Speaker's Office, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, CityHarvest, FoodChange, Transportation Alternatives, and Project for Public Spaces.



Building a More Beautiful and Prosperous Bronx

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WHEDCo CAMPERS FLEX THEIR GREEN THUMBS

After learning about the importance of native plants and pollinators to the ecosystem of the Bronx, WHEDCo's 2008 summer campers created a beautiful, safe habitat for butterflies and bees in our own backyard.

Guided by the Green Guerrillas, a New York City based organization dedicated to creating community gardens, and helped out by community volunteers, WHEDCo campers cultivated two new garden beds at Urban Horizons.

Specifically designed to create butterfly habitats, one bed was planted with native host plants for the caterpillars that kindergarten, first and second grade classes at WHEDCo's partner school, PS/MS 218, will raise into butterflies. Another was planted with flowering plants native to New York— including dwarf sunflowers, common milkweed and mountain

mint— to attract bees and butterflies and jumpstart pollination.



Terence Downing, from Green Guerrillas, shares his green knowledge with a WHEDCo Camper.

As part of the Great Pollinator Project, a national initiative of the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation and the New York City Department of Parks' Greenbelt Native Plant Center, students at PS/MS 218 will participate

in data collection and

reporting in a long-term study of bee pollination patterns.

In coming years, WHEDCo students will continue to care for and study the gardens, adding vital research to both local and national discussion of native pollinators.

"WHEDCo believes all families deserve a beautiful environment and we are thrilled that our summer campers are creating and maintaining these amazing gardens," said Nancy Biberman, WHEDCo's president.

Greenbelt Native Plant Center generously donated 144 flowering plants to WHEDCo's gardens.

Education Coordinator Anne Black and WHEDCo campers plant new garden beds next to PS/MS 218.

