

winter 2009 newsletter

success stories



Photo: Joshua Zuckerman



Sr. Paulette LoMonaco, Caroline Kennedy and Board Member Isaac Mizrahi

Annual Benefit 2009

Transformation through Volunteerism

On Thursday, October 22nd, more than 300 guests enjoyed a beautiful autumn evening at Good Shepherd Services' annual benefit dinner at Tavern on the Green. The theme of this year's event was "Celebrating Service" in honor of the many contributions volunteers have made to our work with young people and families. Among the guests that night were donors, friends of the agency and most importantly, a number of our volunteers.

Joining us that evening was Caroline Kennedy, who served as the keynote speaker. She reminded us of the transformative effect that a single caring volunteer can have on a young person who is struggling. "Each of us has the chance and the power to change the world... Each one of us has a special gift to share that will make life better for those around us," she said. At the close of her speech, she invited all of the volunteers in the room to stand and be recognized with a round of applause.

We were also pleased to hear from three individuals who have generously shared their time and talents with our young people – Holly Gaddy, a corporate volunteer from UBS, who is engaged in the firm's special collaboration with Good Shepherd, working with students at Automotive High School; Donna Rosato, a financial journalist who works with youth both at our annual, campus-based college retreat weekend and at the Chelsea Foyer at the Christopher; and Richard Desroche, owner of CRG gallery, who is a longtime mentor and was joined by his mentee Carlos. These dedicated individuals have worked with youth across Good Shepherd's many different programs, yet they were consistent in expressing that they have been as affected by their interactions with our participants as the young people have been. Donna perhaps put it best, when she said, "I am deeply inspired by the young people I have met. They are not pitiful beings, but young people with tremendous potential... To play a small role in [their] lives is extremely gratifying."

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

It is important to remember, especially during this holiday season, that the greatest gift we can give one another is the gift of ourselves in relationship. At Good Shepherd, we believe that accompanying another person—on even a small part of their life journey—is one of the greatest blessings we can give. Contributing our time and talents to another is a transformative experience for all involved.

Each year, we help over 20,000 children, young people and their families to make a safe passage to self-sufficiency by building on the strength of our relationships with them, and surrounding them with a web of supports that assist them in creating more positive futures.

This issue of Success Stories highlights just a few of the many ways that strong relationships have enabled our program participants to grow, find new direction, and most importantly, to believe in themselves. Whether it's a troubled teen who begins to make better life choices after connecting with a particular staff member, a middle school student discovering a newfound sense of responsibility after being entrusted with a first internship, or a group of children learning to dream bigger and better futures for themselves through exposure to all of the wonderful career paths open to them—all of these transformations come about through a meaningful relationship with an adult. And relationships like these are powerful tools for positive change.

In this season of giving, we count upon our many friends and supporters to help us ensure that we are there for our program participants on their journey to becoming happy, healthy and self-sufficient adults. I hope that you will remember our mission to young people at this special time of year by contributing to our toy drive, volunteering your time, or simply making a contribution in support of our work.

All of us at Good Shepherd wish you and your loved ones a happy holiday season and peace in the New Year.

Sincerely,

Paulette Lo Monaco

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Broadening the Horizons of After-School Youth

Four of Good Shepherd's after-school programs in the Bronx – PS/MS 15 & 291, MS 206, CS 300 and PS 79 – helped to shine a light on the importance of after-school programs in their communities by participating in “Lights on After-Schools” on October 22nd. A national day of awareness, “Lights on After-Schools” aims to highlight what a rich resource after-school programs are to the youth who participate and how the benefits of keeping children safe and engaged during the after school hours extend to the entire community.

More than 2,000 elementary and middle school children attend one of our 12 after-school programs, located in high-need communities in Brooklyn and the Bronx. For parents, this means that they can work to support their families, knowing that their children are safe and well-cared for. For the young people who participate, in addition to daily homework help, they are exposed to new experiences that broaden their horizons and complement the lessons learned during the day.

At MS 45 in the Bronx for example, science, math and physics come alive for the 10 – 13 year-old students in the weekly robotics class. The “Master Minds,” as the students have named themselves, work to create original robots made out of Legos. Last summer, they participated in the New York City DYCD Lego League Tournament, placing second in research and presentation and in the global top nine for their robot's technical and performance abilities. The Master Minds also participated in “Climate Connections” where

teams researched and presented robotic technological solutions for climate change. “Besides being engaged in a positive activity, they're getting science and math enhancement,” says Sylvia Hill, the program director. “They're also gaining teamwork skills. It was by learning to work together that they managed to get so far in the competition.”

Rap and hip hop gave way to classical music and arias this fall at PS 15 in Brooklyn, when students were treated to a two-day workshop with Chelsea Opera Company. Lynne Hayden-Findlay, one of Chelsea Opera's co-founders, gave the students an overview of the basics of this beautiful art form, singing for and with them, engaging them in dance exercises and explaining the different jobs (other than singing) that exist within an opera company. The young people also had the opportunity to work with the set designer from Chelsea Opera's current production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Each youth was given a piece of cardboard on which to draw and paint part of a cityscape. All of the individual pieces were then put together to create a backdrop used in the show, which the young people and their families attended in November. Everyone had a wonderful time at the performance, perhaps none more so than Jaden, who could be heard singing down the street, in his best opera voice, “This is the best thing ev-er!”

Middle school students at PS 32 in Brooklyn participate in “Choice” once a week, where youth are able to select one of three skill-building activities to participate in during the semester. “Media



Photo: Laura Dwight

Spot” teaches video production skills, “Hip Hop Production” helps students to write and record their own lyrics and in “Step Dancing” they learn choreography and develop their own routines. Twice a week, 12 of the 7th and 8th graders also serve as interns at the PS 32 after-school program. Youth interview with staff to earn their positions and regularly attend workshops on professionalism and child care, in addition to working with the younger children. “Middle school youth are now really being seen as leaders at the program, which also rolls over into the community and the regular school day,” says Brooklyn division director, Jennifer Zanger.

In the Bronx, our Aiming High leadership training program, which began at MS 118, now includes middle school students enrolled in the after-school programs at MS 206 and PS/MS 15. Youth are coached in work habits, public speaking, team-building skills, child development, and money management and take part in community service projects and internship opportunities. At MS 118, Aiming High students created their own business, the “Snack Spot,” a snack store for the after-school program, and working as a clerk in the store is one of several internship options available to the young people.

These are just a few of the many activities at Good Shepherd's after-school programs. We believe that if we expose young people to enriching activities, to all of the possibilities that the world of work has to offer and help them develop the leadership, teamwork and interpersonal skills they need to get there, then there is nothing they can't accomplish.



Chelsea Opera's set designer, Sean Tribble, shows the youth a model for one of his scenic designs.

New York Life Volunteers Make a Difference for our Young People

New York Life Insurance Company's slogan is "The Company You Keep." For the past two and a half years Good Shepherd has enjoyed New York Life's company through a variety of employee volunteer projects.

Since the spring of 2007, New York Life has hosted 12 volunteer projects ranging from a career panel for Brooklyn YABC students to a scavenger hunt at the Museum of Natural History for children from our Bronx Beacon Community Center. These projects, both educational and recreational, have touched the lives of more than 200 youth from across Good Shepherd programs and provided them with unique and memorable experiences.

New York Life has also been a very generous contributor to our annual holiday gift drive. Last year they "adopted" 14 families within our family counseling and foster care prevention programs in the Bronx and Brooklyn, purchased gifts for the young women at our group residence in Manhattan, and fulfilled the wish lists of 40 children at our Family Foster Care Program. In addition to playing Santa to so many of our youth and their families, New York Life employee "elves" hosted a holiday party complete with a hot cocoa machine and arts and crafts gift making table. They also sponsored a quintessential New York holiday activity: ice skating at Wollman Rink in Central Park for teenagers in foster care. Similar activities are underway this holiday season.

While projects like these have helped to shape and grow our partnership, it is the ongoing workshops at New York Life with youth from our after-school program at PS 32 in Brooklyn that have truly defined the relationship and become our signature program with the company. We are currently in the sixth cycle



New York Life Volunteer, Jennifer Phillips with youth from PS 32.

of these multi-week career exploration and life skills development workshops based upon Junior Achievement (JA) curricula. For six weeks in the spring and fall, 25 pre-teens from the after-school spend 90 minutes with New York Life volunteers engaged in lessons and hands-on group activities designed to expand youth's knowledge and broaden their horizons. The lessons are followed by a shared dinner, which encourages youth and volunteers to bond and allows a mentoring element to infuse the program. Program director Karen Pomerantz stresses the value of the partnership, "It has provided our 6th graders with engaging curricula and supportive adult role models, along with

exposure to a corporate work environment. Each week our participants look forward to their New York Life trip, which has become a hallmark of our middle school programming."

Jennifer Phillips, a New York Life volunteer from the program's inception, took over as team leader for the workshops in the spring of 2008. Her passion for the program and for inspiring youth is evident: "I love how smart the kids are—you can almost see the wheels turning in their heads, especially when they are able to relate a discussion to what they are learning in school, or to what's going on in their lives," she says. Phillips' enthusiasm and dedicated leadership has no doubt helped to retain volunteers,

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A SUCCESS STORY TO BE PROUD OF

Good Shepherd recently received an online donation, and while these kinds of contributions aren't unusual, the note that came with this one was. The gift was made in honor of a youth named Stanley, by the members of his speechwriting class at Penn State. His classmates were deeply moved by a speech he gave on how greatly affected he was by his participation in one of our programs and collectively they decided to make a donation in support of our work.

Stanley was a young man of 17 when he came to be part of a public school suspension program for adolescent students on suspension from their home schools. "I was on a rampage;

my parents didn't understand me, and my teachers didn't care. It took a walk down the hallways of a county jail for me to realize I needed a little help," he remembers.

For Stanley, the road from the courtroom to a classroom at Penn State began with a social worker named Elvin. During the two months of his suspension, when he attended the school, Stanley developed a strong relationship with Elvin and for the first time in a long time, he felt understood. "Having been in trouble himself when he was younger, Elvin knew how to connect with everyone there. He was much more than a counselor, he was a friend," Stanley says.

In this environment of support and encouragement, he began to change. The once troubled teenager started to enjoy going to school and even made some friends. By the end of his suspension, as he prepared to return to his regular high school, Stanley felt that he was a changed man. In his speech, Stanley says, "If you want a success story just look at me. That arrest became nothing more than a minor setback... Good Shepherd Services helped guide me and escalated my self esteem from the mezzanine to the top floor."

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Matching Gifts

Many companies have a matching gift program. You can maximize your contribution to us by completing the appropriate matching gift form. Please log on to www.goodshepherds.org to see if your company matches gifts.

Workplace Giving

Direct your United Way contribution to Good Shepherd Services by marking **001138** on your pledge card. You will also find us listed in the campaign brochures of the State Employee Federated Appeal, the Combined Municipal Campaign, the Combined Federal Campaign and the CUNY Campaign for Voluntary Charitable Giving.

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New York Life Volunteers

such as Uma Subramanian, who believe in the value of the program and continue to return each semester: "When I see the students apply or relate what they are learning to their experiences or to other things they learned at school, I see the impact," says Subramanian.

Over the course of our partnership, more than 100 youth have benefitted from the lessons and the consistent, positive interaction with caring adults. In our view, the program has been a great success, though we realize that the greatest measure of success is the impact that it has on the young people, such as Denzel, whose comments reflect the sentiments of his peers: "The volunteers are helpful and respectful. I look forward to coming here. Half of the things I learned here I didn't know and didn't learn in school."

ANNUAL FUND

Partner with Good Shepherd as we work to help young people build stronger connections to family, school and community. As reflected in this newsletter, we have been working to strengthen, deepen and expand our services so that more young people can be helped in making a safe passage to self-sufficiency. In these uncertain times, your support is all the more important, as we continue to serve as a model for other agencies helping vulnerable youth and families. Please consider helping us reach our Annual Fund goal by sending in your contribution today. Alternatively, you may donate online at: www.goodshepherds.org.

GO GREEN!

The Success Stories newsletter is now available electronically. Published three times a year, the newsletter keeps you up-to-date on Good Shepherd's latest program activities. **If you would prefer to receive Success Stories via email, rather than by mail, please contact Nada Awad at 212-243-7070, ext. 313 or email her at Nada_Awad@goodshepherds.org.**

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

Good Shepherd Services recently launched a Facebook page and would like to invite those who use Facebook to become a fan of our work, by connecting to the GSS page. The page features links to videos about how our work has impacted individual participants, as well as photos of our programs in action. A link to the Facebook page is provided on the homepage of the GSS website (www.goodshepherds.org) or just type "Good Shepherd Services" into the Facebook search engine.

