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NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY LAUNCHES WIZARD'S CORNER PILOT PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

Program Provides Desks, Lamps and Chairs for Young Residents to Create Their Own Personal Space at Home for Homework and Study

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Chairman John B. Rhea and Olmstead Properties' Joseph Rosenblatt were joined by community leaders at the Towers Community Center in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn to open first of three Wizard's Corner program sites.

Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) Assistant Commissioner Darryl Rattray, and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City Director of Programs Jenny Sharfstein Kane today were joined by at Independence to launch the new pilot for the. The Wizard's Corner pilot program is underwritten by a $250,000 grant from Mr. Rosenblatt made to the Mayor's Fund, and will provide desks, lamps and chairs to eligible children ages 5 to 11 in NYCHA developments in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn to help create their own personal space at home where they can study, read, and complete school and homework assignments.

"On behalf of NYCHA's Board and its residents, we are grateful to Mr. Rosenblatt for his generosity to the youngest and most vulnerable New Yorkers," said NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea. "His wish to provide the most basic necessities to help our children learn the proper practices and habits of studying and completing assignments emphasizes the importance of education, and will help to prepare them for lifelong learning and success."

"My family and I are excited to have an opportunity to assist the New York City Housing Authority in their efforts to make this pilot program a reality," said Mr. Rosenblatt, a lifelong New Yorker and a proud graduate of New York City public schools. "By providing these basic items for the children's individual use, we are helping them to practice their reading and writing, and spelling and arithmetic. If they are deprived of the opportunity to do any homework every night, by the time they reach fourth grade, the learning gap will have turned into a learning gulf."

Wizard's Corner was inspired by Mr. Rosenblatt's visit to an apartment building years ago, where he saw a need for children to have their own homework space. The program will provide eligible elementary school children, ages 5 to 11, with up to $250 of basic equipment to help them develop self-discipline, good study habits, and effective time management skills, and will engage families early in their children's education, helping to prepare them for a lifetime of success. Children may also receive assistance in the form of additional educational materials and supplies that may include dictionaries, supplemental study material, calculators and educational software if the eligible child has access to a computer. The grant does not provide for the purchase of computers, and no financial awards in lieu of equipment and supplies will be provided to participants.

Wizard's Corner will launch in three community centers in NYCHA developments—Williamsburg Houses, Independence Towers, and Taylor-Wythe Houses—and has a two-pronged approach. One approach will focus on children who take part in after-school programs in the participating community centers, and the second will focus on eligible children living in the specific developments but who do not participate in the community center programming. The program expects to serve 400 children in its first year of operation.

"Mr. Rosenblatt clearly recognizes that our city's young students face many challenges, and providing them with tools that enhance their study environment will give these youth a leg up on success," said Mayor's Fund President Megan Sheekey. "We are pleased to partner with NYCHA on this creative program and raise additional support to even further increase the program's reach."

"We are delighted to be part of this exciting pilot, which supports one of the most important goals we strive for in our programming," said DYCD Commissioner Jeanne B. Mullgrav. "Creating the time, space, and resources young people need to develop the skills and habits to succeed in school, work and life is what our Cornerstone Centers, and all our afterschool initiatives, are all about. We look forward to seeing the Wizard's Corners come to fruition, and to helping engage our youth and families in making the most of them."

Staff from NYCHA's Brooklyn Community Operations and Family Services departments will screen, identify and recommend children for the program. The center-based model will create a special Wizard's Corner onsite complete with reading couch(es), lamp(s), and chair(s) to imitate the setup that the children will have at home. Children coming into the centers will have access to the Wizard's Corner Monday to Friday from 3:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Eligible children will receive a desk, lamp and chair for their at-home use. Grant funds will be administered by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City in coordination with NYCHA's Office of Public/Private Partnerships. The Mayor's Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that facilitates innovative public-private partnerships such as Wizard's Corner. Desks and chairs will be purchased from Gothic Cabinet Craft which will deliver the already-assembled furniture to the developments for families to pick up.

To measure the success of the center-based program, NYCHA has prepared and distributed a pre-survey instrument to the participating community centers, which will help to identify areas where the children report they need specific help so that volunteers, who are currently being recruited, are appropriately equipped. NYCHA will also work with the local schools that have participants in the program to identify whether the child's study and work habits have improved through increased homework submission or with better grades. Parents will also be provided with a survey to help identify the areas in which they think their child needs help, the type of assistance necessary, and whether they wish to be provided with additional resources to help their child.

"Mr. Rosenblatt's generous donation underscores how education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and I appreciate his and NYCHA's dedication to this initiative," said Department of Education Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott. "The coordination of resources and services across agencies is essential towards ensuring our students get the supports they need to achieve lifelong success."

The pilot program will run from January 2012 to June 2012, and will resume at the beginning of the school year in September 2012 and run through the completion of the school year in June 2013. This will be the established programmatic cycle until funds for the program are exhausted. NYCHA is working with the Mayor's Fund to secure additional private support to sustain the Wizard's Corner program. To donate, please contact the Mayor's Fund at (212) 788-7794 or go to www.nyc.gov/fund.

NYC & Company, New York City's official marketing, tourism and partnership organization, provided their creative services pro-bono to design the Wizard's Corner logo, and printing services were generously donated by Duggal Visual Solutions, Inc.

Furniture provider Gothic Cabinet Craft first opened in 1969, and is the largest manufacturer of unfinished furniture on the East Coast. Gothic provides quality, affordable real wood furniture that comes with a lifetime warranty, something few other furniture companies can offer. With the ability to ship anywhere in the U.S., Gothic furniture is designed to meet the unique needs of urban living.

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