



*Reaching the Maximum Level of Self-Sufficiency*

## Traveling Commissioner's Forum Spurs Communication Close Up

This summer Commissioner Doar is holding HRA's annual forum as a traveling event in which he and senior advisors meet with staff at their work locations. The purpose of the forum remains the same: to discuss accomplishments of the last year and future direction, giving staff the opportunity to contribute input and have their questions answered. But meeting with staff in smaller groups in their workplaces is making contact more personal and informal and also allows the Commissioner to become acquainted with some offices he has not had the opportunity to visit before, he said.



*Commissioner Doar, with Executive Deputy Commissioner Frank Donno, speaking with staff at a forum event*

HRA Perspective attended the forum given at the Office of Child Support Enforcement's (OCSE) Queens Center on July 30. OCSE's deputy commissioner Fran Pardus-Abbadessa attended with Commissioner Doar, as well as other members of the senior staff. Queens office manager Estelle welcomed the commissioner, and the office provided refreshments for what was a concise but forceful assessment of the state of HRA's work and goals for the 2008-09 year.

At the top of HRA's list of accomplishments are having achieved the annual goal of placing 75,000 New Yorkers in jobs and setting a record high in child support collection while expanding initiatives providing practical and emotional support to low-income fathers. Among Commissioner Doar's goals for the coming year are continuing to improve customer service. "Our agency is doing well and has been recognized by the Mayor and other agencies. This is because of the work you do with the public," he said.

Commissioner Doar's presentation is posted on HRA's Intranet, as well as responses to generally pertinent questions that have been asked so far. You can email your own questions to [Commissionersforum@hra.nyc.gov](mailto:Commissionersforum@hra.nyc.gov) and will receive responses within a few weeks.

## Senior Works to Help Aging New Yorkers

Aging city residents collecting public assistance automatically receive added guidance from the Senior Works program housed at the Union Square Job Center once they turn 60.

Clients receive a letter stating they are transferred to the Senior Works program. Then case workers help clients qualify for social security benefits and other assistance, like the senior citizen rent exemption and MTA reduced fare, said Sentrial Joy, Senior Works director.

"This has been very successful," he said. As of Aug. 10, the program, serving all five boroughs, had 8,037 clients. "Increases are expected in the next few years as baby boomers are reaching age 60," Joy said.

Senior Works holds job fairs to place seniors who might not have worked long enough or earned enough income during their working years to qualify for social security benefits. One organization that has place clients is Easter Seals. Joy said that during job fairs clients are screened by Easter Seals and employees to learn each client's skill set. Most clients are assigned to do clerical and administrative work.

The housing unit at the job center diligently works to submit requests for rent arrears for these clients. Joy said about 90 percent of these requests are approved by the rental assistance unit.



## HRA Program Updates

### HRA Goes on YouTube

Now you can log onto YouTube.com at home and find the public service announcement video HRA created for NYC-DADS. The PSA was the same one launched for Father's Day in cabs throughout the city.



HRA will be launching more features using social media and other web tools in order to expand the reach to the general public on HRA and its programs and initiatives.

### OCSE Hosts Employer Workshop

On July 29, HRA's Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) hosted a workshop entitled "Child Support: Basic Facts and Employer Responsibilities" for employers. Staff from OCSE and the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance's Division of Child Support presented background on the child support program and explained their role and legal responsibilities for processing income withholding and medical support orders. The purpose of the workshop was to review key aspects of what is required when processing court-ordered income and medical withholdings. Particular attention was given to the importance of timely and correct processing of income withholdings as errors cause non-custodial parents to be subject to enforcement actions and custodial parents don't receive timely payments to meet family obligations.

### HRA Perspective Monthly Bulletin

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## Event Calendar

### BEGIN Culinary Arts Graduation

**Friday, Aug. 22, 2008**

Culinary Arts Program Graduation, 4 to 5:30 PM, BEGIN Managed Programs Consortium for Worker Education, 36-46 37th St., Long Island City.

### HRA Blood Drives

Help Maintain NYC's blood supply. Make your donation at the following locations:

**Wednesday, August 20, 2008**, Linden Center # 67, 45 Hoyt Street, 5th Floor Room 525, Brooklyn, NY from 11:00 AM to 4:30 PM. To make an appointment, call Maria Ruparsic at 718-237-7331.

**Thursday, September 11, 2008**, Metrotech Center Busmobile, 15 Metrotech, Brooklyn, NY from 10:00 AM to 3:30 PM. To make an appointment, call Larry Brown at 718-510-0371.

## LGBT Pride Event Reintroduces an Important Tradition

HRA held its second LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Pride celebration—the first was organized twenty years ago—at 180 Water Street on July 30. Frank Donno, Office of Staff Resources executive deputy commissioner, who welcomed staff asked, “What better time than now to honor the cultural diversity we have at HRA by reinitiating this event?” The event was an unqualified success in raising sensitivity to GLBT issues in the workplace and in creating a celebration of gay pride for all to enjoy.



(left to right: Frank Donno, Melissa Sklarz, Connie Ress)

The program featured a short documentary, “In My Shoes,” bringing viewers into the lives of three young people with GLBT parents, and a discussion of the rights and challenges of transgender people in the workplace led by Melissa Sklarz, director of NY Transgender Rights Organization, a compelling speaker.

The program was led by Donno and OPIC's Media Director Connie Ress. Barbara Woods, OSR's Special Events Director and the GLBT planning committee coordinated the celebration. BEGIN's Culinary Arts Program prepared and served the refreshments.

Commissioner Doar thanked the organizers for making this important contribution to HRA's culture of diversity. The celebration left all with a sense of accomplishment. The planners invite staff to join in organizing future activities.

## Bronze Award to HRA

HRA received a Bronze Award for 548 donations in Manhattan to the New York Blood Services, which helps New York City hospitals meet their critical need for blood. Awards were presented at the annual recognition breakfast, held July 17th at the Rockefeller Plaza Rainbow Room. Congratulations to organizers and donors, who hope even more of their co-workers will join the campaign going forward.



## 311 Expands Services in NYC

Through expanded 311, New Yorkers are now able to easily access nonprofits and nongovernmental social service agencies in all five boroughs, whether to obtain assistance and services for themselves, a loved one or friend.

Consulting with more than 50 not-for-profit organizations, and more than 20 government agencies, New York City designed a system that allows access to nearly 1,000 unique social services and 1,300 non-profit organizations accessible 24 hours a day through 311. The expanded social services enhancements were developed based upon the areas of priority as identified by the City's Center for Economic Opportunity.

New York's 311 is now the nation's largest social service information and referral call center. Providing 24/7 live by operators trained in areas of specialization, it has become a model for other jurisdictions seeking to provide single point access to live help with social service requests



## Commitment is Main Ingredient for Successful Program

In July, 30 adults graduated from FECS HRA BEGIN's GED program in the Bronx at the 147th Street site.

The program, which is operated by FECS, a not-for-profit, in partnership with HRA and FIA, involves a lot of commitment from students, said Iolette Brown, director of FECS HRA BEGIN. Classes are held two days a week from 9 AM to 5 PM for six months. After three months in the program, students can take the GED test. If they pass, the student is then sent on to HRA where he or she is assisted with job placement.

Brown said most people in the GED program are high school drop outs. Virginia Cruickshank, senior VP FECS Employment, Career and Workforce Development, said 1,200 people go through the GED program each year. “It's a critical service for the City,” she said.

Students in the program must undergo eight hours of exams over two days in order to pass GED tests in five core content areas.

FECS BEGIN is an authorized GED testing site, approved by the New York State Department of Education. Initially a literacy and employment initiative, today BEGIN's focus is adult basic education classes, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and GED classes that promote literacy through reading, writing, speaking, listening and critical thinking skills through English language arts, social studies, science, mathematics and job placement.

