



HRA Receives 2011 USDA Hunger Champion Award

On Wednesday, January 11, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Northeast Regional Administrator James Arena-DeRosa presented HRA Commissioner Robert Doar with a USDA Hunger Champion Award. The award, one of ten given out in 2011, recognizes HRA's exemplary service in helping eligible clients get food stamp benefits. HRA was nominated for the award by the Food Bank for New York for implementing a citywide "Mediation Model" of communication between the Agency and the over 70 community based organizations who provide application assistance to those in need.



HRA Commissioner Robert Doar

"Our Food Stamp Program has responded with excellence to the increased need for assistance by significantly increasing enrollment," said HRA Commissioner Robert Doar. "There is no question that the \$280 million in benefits that the program distributes each month have been an important ingredient in New York City families weathering tough financial times. I would like to thank the USDA, the Food Bank for New York and all our community partners for their recognition and support of the work we do every day. We are extremely proud to be honored with this award."



USDA Northeast Regional Administrator James Arena-DeRosa, Commissioner Doar, and Rev. Henry Behlin, Chairman of the Board, Food Bank for NYC

The Mediation Model was created by HRA in a 2009 partnership with the Food Bank for New York. It allows community based organizations to work on behalf of clients to troubleshoot and resolve problems that may come up during the food stamp application process and greatly improves collaboration between HRA and these organizations. Over 70 community organizations in the five boroughs have been trained to use the Mediation Model, which also has been shown to reduce the need for Fair Hearings by efficiently resolving issues before they get to the hearing level. Since January 2011, community based organizations and HRA have reported the resolution of over 2004 cases through the model.

The Food Stamp Program has had a positive impact on many New Yorkers' lives, especially since the 2008 economic crisis. Ms. Rahisa López, a

former recipient of food stamps, attended the award ceremony to share the story of how the program helped her through a difficult time.

“I lost my job and needed to apply for food stamps in June of 2010. For months I lived on an almost non-existent income while embarking on a job search that almost always led me to dead ends,” said Ms. López. “I used to go to the grocery store and found myself with insufficient cash to buy very basic food items. My food stamps always complemented my budget for food while I could put aside enough to pay for my rent. HRA and America Works also helped with job tips and soon after I found a job in a large car dealership in Brooklyn as a receptionist. Then I was screened for a customer service position with NYC’s 311 vendor. I was hired right away and because I work very hard, I have always received good evaluations. Food stamps helped me in between jobs and today, I no longer need them or any kind of public assistance. I see myself with the company for a very long time and why not, maybe I will be able to become a team leader.”

HRA’s Food Stamp program continues to help New Yorkers in need. With the City’s caseload at a record high, the program has still managed to maintain a low payment error rate, prevent fraud, waste and abuse, and improve service to New Yorkers with online applications, phone recertification and other tools to make the process easier and more efficient.