

Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York

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PAL Play Street opens at Douglass Houses in Manhattan's Upper West Side

BRIDGET G. BRENNAN, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, ALANA SWEENEY, Executive Director of New York City's Police Athletic League, New York County District Attorney CYRUS R. VANCE, JR., New York City Housing Authority Chairman JOHN B. RHEA and New York City Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY, announced today the opening of a Police Athletic League (PAL) Play Street at the Douglass Houses, a New York City Housing Authority complex located in Manhattan's Upper West Side. The program will provide youth in the residential complex with recreational opportunities for a seven-week summer session.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony this morning at the Douglass Houses marked the opening of the PAL Play Street. Financial support for the program is derived from narcotics trafficking proceeds obtained during criminal prosecutions by the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor. The Play Street, located at the Stadium Court basketball court, 102nd Street between Columbus Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue, officially began on July 9 and will run through August 24. Douglass Houses is comprised of 17 buildings and houses over 4,500 residents.

Young people ages 6 to 16 are invited to participate in the PAL Play Street, where they can join in a range of games, sports and other fun activities, such as table games, cultural arts and basketball tournaments. The program includes a prevention education component designed to reduce risk-taking behaviors and foster life skills. During the weeks it is in session, the site will operate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Beginning in May, the Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Office and the NYPD's Narcotics Borough Manhattan North arrested 29 narcotics traffickers operating in the Douglass Houses. The charges followed a yearlong investigation, which was launched in response to widespread drug dealing and violence in the area. The case involved over 40 sales of crack-cocaine. During one of the arrests, police seized a firearm and ammunition from an apartment where two young children were present. Twenty of these prosecutions are being handled by Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Office, while the Manhattan District Attorney's Office is handling nine.

By supporting PAL, the prosecutors' offices join in a cooperative effort to maintain the gains achieved when drug organizations are removed from a community, and to improve relationships between young people and law enforcement. The Play Street serves as a safe haven for youth who might otherwise be subjected to gang recruitment and other criminal activity, including violence and drug dealing. It is the result of a successful collaboration between law enforcement, PAL, the New York City Housing Authority, local agencies and community members dedicated to protecting the safety of residents and improving the quality of life for young people.

New York City's Police Athletic League is the first, finest and largest civilian-run PAL in the country. Founded in 1914, PAL provides recreational, educational, cultural and social activities to over 50,000 boys and girls annually. It is also the city's largest, independent, nonprofit youth organization.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor BRIDGET G. BRENNAN said, "Earlier this year, my office oversaw a major investigation at Douglass Houses in response to community complaints about narcotics trafficking and drug-related violence in the area. One defendant in that case endangered two small children by keeping narcotics, an illegal firearm and ammunition in an apartment where they lived. We arrested this man and 28 others. Now, my office and our partners are supporting a new Play Street at Douglass Houses in the hopes of making a lasting, positive impact on children in the community. We are thankful to the Police Athletic League for their leadership in improving the lives of New York City's children, by providing safe places to enjoy fun, recreational activities."

PAL's Executive Director ALANA SWEENEY said, "Children in this neighborhood will have a safe place to play and learn under the supervision of trained youth development professionals, this summer. As they learn valuable life skills, the harm done to the children and the community by the drug dealers will gradually be repaired. PAL is grateful to the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for having the vision to utilize these funds to the benefit of the children of the Douglass Houses."

Manhattan District Attorney CYRUS R. VANCE, JR., said, "As members of law enforcement, our responsibility to protect the public isn't just about prosecuting cases — it's also about partnering with communities to make sure that our kids remain safe. By using money seized from drug dealers in this very community, we are making an investment to provide a safe place for kids to spend their summer. Thanks to the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, NYPD, Police Athletic League, and New York City Housing Authority for working together to ensure that the youth of Douglass Houses have a better chance for a brighter future."

"The New York City Housing Authority recognizes that providing our youth with recreational and educational programs such as PAL Play Street at the Douglass Houses will afford them invaluable life skills," said NYCHA Chairman JOHN B. RHEA. "Our youth are not only our most precious resource, but they are indeed our future and the future health and prosperity of New York City rests on how well we prepare and support them today, in programs like PAL's."

Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY said, "Nothing says summer more than Play Streets, where New York's future can play safely with the seasoned assistance of the Police Athletic League. I can't think of a better use for proceeds from the sale of illegal narcotics."