

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

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PAL Teen Impact Center Opens at I.S. 229 in the Bronx

BRIDGET G. BRENNAN, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, Bronx District Attorney ROBERT T. JOHNSON, ALANA SWEENY, Executive Director of New York City's Police Athletic League, New York City Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY and DR. EZRA B. MATTHIAS, Principal of I.S. 229, Roland Patterson School, announced today the opening of a Police Athletic League (PAL) Teen Impact Center at I.S. 229. The center will provide youth in the Morris Heights section of the Bronx with recreational opportunities for a six-month session.

Financial support for the center is derived from narcotics trafficking proceeds obtained during criminal prosecutions by the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and the Bronx DA's office. The program will run from Dec. 5, 2011 through May 28, 2012 at I.S. 229, 275 Harlem River Park Bridge.

Young people ages 12 to 16 are invited to participate in the Teen Impact Center, where they can join in a wide range of sports and other fun activities, such as Cops & Kids Basketball, volleyball, dance and cultural events. The program includes a prevention education component designed to reduce risk-taking behaviors, such as gang activity, and foster life skills. During the weeks it is in session, the site will operate from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Wednesday.

Over the past two years, both Special Narcotics and the Bronx DA's office dismantled entrenched drug networks that were operating in the immediate vicinity. 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.

Special Narcotics and the Bronx DA's office previously gave financial support to a PAL Summer Play Street located at I.S. 229. That program was PAL's first indoor play street and offered a full summer experience to the 139 participants who participated. This program, which ran through July and August, was also funded through narcotics trafficking proceeds obtained during criminal prosecutions by Special Narcotics Prosecutor and the Bronx DA's office.

In addition to sports and recreation, participants in the PAL Summer Play Street benefited from a curriculum with weekly themes that included the importance of being healthy, having a positive self

esteem, conflict resolution and how to be powerful and aware of bullying situations. Youth also joined in a Bronx Borough Day Celebration and displayed cultural banners with young people from around the Bronx. Due to the overwhelming success of the I.S. 229 Summer Play Street program, the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and the Bronx DA's office have chosen to support the PAL Teen Impact Center.

The center 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, the New York City Department of Education, local agencies and community members dedicated to protecting the safety of residents and improving the quality of life for young people. More than 150 young people participated in the Teen Impact Center at I.S. 229 last year.

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, "PAL programs and this community are a great fit. Over the past year, young people participated in a Teen Impact Center and a Summer Play Street at I.S. 229 and made those programs a success. We're happy to join the Bronx District Attorney's Office in ensuring these young people continue to have a safe place to have fun with their friends in 2012. What better way to use money seized from drug dealers than to create something positive in communities that were harmed?"

ROBERT T. JOHNSON, Bronx District Attorney, said, "We firmly believe that time invested in providing opportunities for young people also helps prevent crime and thereby provides much more to the community than simply prosecuting offenders after the harm is done. We are grateful that PAL is here to provide those services."

PAL's Executive Director ALANA SWEENEY said, "Giving youth a safe place to enjoy wholesome activities in the evening hours, under the supervision of trained professionals, is an effective crime reduction strategy. If teens are occupied and having fun in an Impact Center, they are not on the street, being recruited by gangs or in danger of being a victim of their crossfire. Use of funds seized from drug dealers to prevent crime through these Impact Centers is a creative way to build community and invest in the future of its youth."

Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY said, "Teens can't hide from the reality of drugs and other risks on the street, but with PAL's help they can develop skills to avoid them."

DR. EZRA B. MATTHIAS, Principal of I.S. 229, said, "We are fully aware that youth and their families face multiple stressors and challenges each day. At IS 229 we work on building proficiency in the skills our students need to improve their lives and their environment. In collaboration with the Bronx District Attorney's Office, the Office of Special Narcotics for the City of New York and the Police Athletic League we are partnering to foster the belief in our youth that they can achieve and become everything they envision."