

December 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Urban Advantage students from PS 226 in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn at the annual science fair at the Museum of Natural History. For their Exit Project, Adam, Moe, and Frank explored how a solar-power car works.

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## Taking Advantage of the Urban Advantage

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002, states have faced increased pressure to improve student's math and reading test scores. But does the emphasis on standardized tests ensure that students are being taught what they need to know, or is it crowding out the range of activities that make classroom learning interesting and fun? One clear result is that many subjects besides English and math are getting short shrift. According to Jim Short, director of the Gottesman Center for Science Teaching and Learning at the

**“Although City public schools don’t have the wealthy tax base of suburban schools, they do have a wealth of science-rich institutions. This program makes it possible for middle school students to take full advantage of this urban advantage.” —Kavitha Mediratta, Trust education program officer**

American Museum of Natural History, “a lack of focus on the sciences has too often resulted in an outdated and textbook-driven science curriculum that doesn’t teach students *how* to do science—collecting data, developing a hypothesis, and posing a testable question.”

Science has also been sidelined because there is a nationwide shortage of trained science teachers. In the City, many have little experience using hands-on science activities in their classrooms, and teachers are often just one lesson ahead of their students. Principals, many who are new to the job, also need guidance on how to work with teachers to improve science instruction. As a result of these deficits in funding and focus, in a 2005 national assessment (the most recent data available) two-thirds of the City’s 8th graders didn’t know basic science.

The **American Museum of Natural History**, concerned that the City’s public schools students were not being prepared to even consider a career in science, worked with the Department of Education and seven other cultural institutions in the City to start Urban Advantage in 2004. This successful and popular program helps teachers build a curriculum based on scientific inquiry and problem solving and includes trips to the City’s great science institutions.

Allison Cooke, who teaches eighth-grade science at the Bronx School for Law, Government, and Justice, was one of the first in her school to go through the Urban Advantage training. “I learned how to teach kids to do real scientific investigation by going through the process myself. We even completed an Exit Project, a science project that my students must complete at the end of the year.” Now she helps lead Urban Advantage workshops in the evenings for other teachers. She continues, “The program helps kids embrace science based on their interests and what they experience every day. One student said to me, ‘we have a tree near my building and my dad’s the superintendent. He trims it down but it grows back every year.’ Based on this scenario, we figured out what experiments we could do to test growing conditions, and explore how and why trees

grow where they do. Now kids get excited about their Exit Projects early in the year and they love the field trips and being able to see science in action everywhere.” Jim Short adds, “At the zoo, kids are collecting data on animal behavior, or at the botanical garden they observe and record variations in trees or flowers.”

To date, more than 250 teachers and 24,000 students from 147 middle schools have participated in Urban Advantage, and with The Trust’s help it’s growing fast, with programs now in over one-third of all schools with an eighth grade. A **\$100,000** grant will enable the museum to involve 6,000 more students at 10 new schools in the program.

“Although City public schools don’t have the wealthy tax base of suburban schools, they do have a wealth of science-rich institutions,” says Trust education program officer Kavitha Mediratta. “This program makes it possible for middle school students to take full advantage of this urban advantage.”

## Stimulating Green Job Growth Where It’s Needed Most

To stimulate the economy—and deal with global warming—the Obama administration has committed to creating green jobs that pay more than \$15 per hour, more than double the minimum wage in the City. “While there are hundreds of millions of dollars available to the City for weatherization, and more through competitive requests for proposals for clean energy investments, the challenge is to train job seekers for the jobs that are currently available, while helping fiscally and environmentally sustainable businesses grow,” says Patricia Jenny, a program director at The Trust. “Making sure that the stimulus funds are spent to create lasting jobs that significantly reduce the City’s use of fossil fuels takes quick work by experienced groups that are already doing it, like Seedco.”

A **\$100,000** grant to **Seedco (Structured Employment Economic Development Corp.)** is supporting



Students at a weatherization training class organized by Seedco at the Association for Energy Affordability in the Bronx.

Community Retrofit NYC, which will give 1,450 low-income job seekers intensive training and on-the-job experience and place them in the fast-growing field of making old buildings more energy efficient. The grant will also help small businesses expand to meet the demand and create more jobs. This two-tiered approach will help sustain long-term job growth in the City long after the stimulus money is spent.

Seedco will work with job seekers at three community organizations that manage weatherization programs in Harlem, Queens, and Brooklyn. Residents will be trained and certified in the fundamentals and then choose a specialization, such as energy audits, or energy-efficient heating and cooling system installation. Graduates will be placed directly in jobs or internships or referred to specialized training at CUNY and elsewhere.

The program is even helping administrative workers “who have been hit especially hard as financial services and other private sector jobs have collapsed under the economic recession,” says Francine Delgado, senior vice president for New York City programs at Seedco. “We are seeking to place these laid-off workers into

administrative positions in the field. Their skill sets are very transferable, so we will be able to get them up to speed in the retrofitting industry, and find them jobs relatively quickly.”

## Loving Our Neighborhoods

There’s a lot that residents can do when they come together and organize—but hauling junked cars out of vacant lots isn’t one of them, and neither is installing speed bumps, fixing broken street lights, or repairing hazardous playground equipment. Residents know the problems, but connecting with the right City department can stymie even the most dedicated.

That’s why The Trust has made a **\$100,000** grant to the **Citizens’ Committee for New York City’s** Love your (NYC) Block program. After getting a small grant earlier in the year, the program is now in full swing, accepting applications from groups around the City for a small cash award and VIP access to selected City services.

Winning groups will get vacant lots cleaned up, sidewalks and streetlamps repaired, graffiti removed, and woodchips and gardening tools supplied. “These awards will help



As part of the trial run of the Love your (NYC) Block Competition, more than 100 volunteers from the Woodbine Street Block Association in Bushwick, Brooklyn devoted a day to beautifying their block. The City removed a dead tree, assisted with trash collection, and provided additional garbage bins.

build long-lasting working relationships between community groups and the Departments of Parks and Recreation, Sanitation and other City agencies,” says Peter Kostmayer, president of Citizens’ Committee. Neighborhood groups will also get organizing and administrative support. Scott Codey, director of the program says, “We teach groups how to recruit members and find a leadership structure that works for them. When a group is just starting out, they think a lot of problems are totally new, but chances are that other groups have already found ways to solve them, so we share these experiences and save people a lot of trouble.”

The Trust has been funding the Citizens’ Committee for New York City since the late 1970s, helping it foster community throughout the five boroughs. Kostmayer continues, “You get people in a housing project or a block who’ve never met and bring them together through a garden project or mural painting; it’s a wonderful and cost-effective way to keep our neighborhoods good places to live.” One example is Holistic Hood, which received \$1,800 from the Citizens’ Committee to organize free healthy lifestyle workshops for women of color in the

South Bronx, including a weekly yoga class. Women also used these events to share stories, build relationships and community, and get involved in other local projects. Pretty good for under two grand.

## Making the Rockefeller Drug Law Reforms Real

For 36 years, the Rockefeller drug laws mandated draconian sentences for drug dealers and stripped power from judges, resulting in tens of thousands of mostly black and Latino nonviolent drug offenders being locked away for years, and sometimes life.

After piecemeal changes to the laws earlier in the decade, major reforms in April 2009 gave sentencing discretion back to the judges, and eliminated most of the mandatory minimum sentences for felony drug offenders. Though not fully repealed, the laws now give judges the authority to divert non-violent felons to drug treatment. Greg Berman of the **Center for Court Innovation** at the **Fund for the City of New York** says, “The exciting thing about the Rockefeller reforms is that they will provide the fuel to do what New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman has talked about doing for some time: spreading the lessons from New York City’s pioneering drug courts, which link addicted defendants to judicially monitored drug treatment instead of incarceration, throughout the State court system.”

The courts will now have to dramatically change the way they process non-violent drug offenders. A **\$120,000** grant from The Trust will help the Center for Court Innovation train judges and other court personnel. The Center will develop a curriculum and a training seminar for judges, court attorneys, and clerks in the City, Westchester, and on Long Island and test a drug screening protocol in the Bronx.

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Berman continues, “If more judges are going to supervise defendants in treatment, they need to know what they’re doing. They need to understand the nature of addiction, the likelihood of relapse, the impact of drugs on the brain, and the basic elements of behavior modification. They also need to understand federal confidentiality statutes governing those in drug treatment—statutes that have the potential to conflict with the open proceedings that typify criminal court.”

“Translating legislation into concrete action isn’t easy, but this grant will help make the most of the opportunity to treat addiction as a sickness rather than a criminal act,” says Roderick Jenkins, program officer at The Trust. “This is an important step in helping to heal communities that have been ravaged by the Rockefeller drug laws.”

## **Insuring the Hardest to Reach Families**

The good news is that almost every uninsured child and many poor uninsured families in the Empire State are eligible for free or low-cost health care—and much has been done to simplify the enrollment process and expand coverage to as many children as possible. The bad news is that there are still nearly 200,000 kids growing up in the five boroughs without health care. A **\$50,000** grant to the **Children’s Defense Fund – New York** will work to enroll these kids, whose parents are, for the most part, either recently unemployed or from marginal immigrant communities. More families enrolled means better health, fewer crippling medical bills, and cost savings for the City and State.

### *Reaching the Recently Unemployed*

Between March of 2008 and 2009, the unemployment rate in the City doubled, including many people who had never previously needed public assistance. Some are unaware that their kids can be covered by Child Health

Plus, and that they, too, may be eligible for Medicaid or Family Health Plus. Applying for public assistance for the first time can be confusing, so the Children’s Defense Fund is making it easier, developing materials and reaching out to families at supermarkets, salons, and bodegas in poor and working class neighborhoods. They work with nonprofit organizations, local businesses, and community members to publicize and host enrollment events, such as Wellness Day at the beauty salon, where women can enroll in health insurance while they get their hair done.

### *Your Kids May be Eligible, Even if You Aren’t*

Different challenges persist for immigrant families. With none of the federal health reform bills including coverage for undocumented immigrants, immigrant families might be surprised to learn that their children are and will continue to be eligible for health insurance from New York State. These families are understandably wary about going near anything governmental for fear of bringing up their immigration status. In addition, getting health care can be difficult even for native English speakers, so providing help for recent immigrants in their own language can make a big difference.

The Children’s Defense Fund will work with the New York Immigration Coalition to reach out to Haitian, Korean, South Asian, Balkan, Filipino, and Central American communities. Jenny Rejeske of the Coalition says, “Our community partners, who have earned the trust and share the same language and culture as the community members they serve, play an essential role in educating their clients about public health insurance options and allaying their unique concerns.” The Fund will educate staff at these agencies about children’s right to insurance; create and distribute materials in native languages summarizing the enrollment process; and create a referral system to help immigrants find places to sign up.

# Other Grants

## CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

**Hetrick-Martin Institute, \$80,000** to expand the hours of an academic program for gay teens to help them prepare for work and college. Programs include tutoring for SATs, Regents, and the GED, workshops in creative writing and performance art, work readiness training, and paid internships.

**Literacy Assistance Center, \$125,000** to create a Web site for online registration for the high school equivalency exam and information about test prep classes and work readiness programs by zip code.

**New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute, \$150,000** to strengthen and improve the childcare workforce through recruitment and retention of educators, particularly young minority women.

## EDUCATION

**City University of New York, \$100,000** for expansion of Student Success Centers at high schools in the Bronx and Brooklyn to increase the number of poor, minority, and immigrant students who graduate and go to college.

**Executive Leadership Institute, \$50,000** to train assistant principals to become principals in City schools.

**Hunter College of CUNY, \$214,000** to train social work students to help clients with financial problems.

**Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, \$75,000** to help schools develop a better culture for learning, using conflict mediation, cooperative learning, anti-bullying techniques, and supporting guidance counselors.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**Citizens Union Foundation of the City of New York, \$30,000** for advocacy to reform State government, including restructuring the State Board of Elections, strengthening campaign finance rules, and improving the redistricting process.

**New York City Workforce Development Fund, \$125,000** for a funder collaborative focused on building the City's workforce.

**Pratt Area Community Council, \$30,000** to prevent the loss of affordable rental housing by helping 30 buildings threatened with foreclosure or loss of subsidies.

## ENVIRONMENT

**American Museum of Natural History, \$75,000** to help communities in the Solomon Islands protect biodiversity.

**Center for International Environmental Law, \$75,000** to promote chemical safety and protect public health through reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act and other domestic and international chemical regulations.

**Environment Northeast, \$100,000** to advocate for federal policies that mandate effective and enforceable carbon offset measures and protect forests that absorb carbon emissions.

**Green Blue Institute, \$75,000** to promote non-toxic products by expanding a catalogue of safe and environmentally friendly consumer goods.

**Land Trust Alliance, \$75,000** to protect land from development by helping local land trusts gain accreditation.

**New Partners for Community Revitalization, \$50,000** for a coordinator to accelerate brownfields redevelopment and ensure that the process and results meet the needs of surrounding communities.

**One Region Fund, \$200,000** to advocate for the inclusion of measures in the federal transportation bill to fund regional public transportation, and for other measures to improve transportation in the tri-state region.

**Pace Law School, \$50,000** to ensure that funds earmarked for energy efficiency are used to develop effective programs in New York State.

**UPROSE, \$50,000** to advocate for an environmentally friendly port along the waterfront in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

**Wildlife Conservation Society, \$75,000** to protect wildlife habitat and migration corridors in the Greater Yellowstone region.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**Historic House Trust of New York City, \$52,000** to help 23 historic houses improve and coordinate their educational programs.

## ARTS

**Brooklyn Arts Council, \$80,000** to provide visual and performing arts workshops in seven needy Brooklyn elementary and middle schools.

**Center for Arts Education, \$100,000** to help principals create arts programs in their schools through a fellowship program for principals and parents, and a day-long program for school leaders.

**Council on the Arts and Humanities for Staten Island, \$40,000** to improve arts education on Staten Island.

**Dance/USA, \$25,000** to refer dancers to jobs, auditions, funding opportunities, and other resources in New York City through improved online communications.

**Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, \$50,000** to provide artists and writers with temporary studios and rehearsal space in vacant commercial spaces.

**New York Foundation for the Arts, \$25,000** to help immigrant artists through tax and grant-writing seminars, an online newsletter, and a mentorship program.

**Queens Council on the Arts, \$50,000** to provide business training for Queens arts groups and artists.

*The Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund helps gifted young people with limited financial means who aspire to careers in the arts. The grants that follow will support artists who are beginning their careers.*

- **Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, \$60,000** for two-year fellowships for four dancers.
- **American Composers Orchestra, \$20,000** for one-year fellowships for two musicians.
- **Center for Book Arts, \$36,000** for one-year fellowships for six artists.
- **Ghetto Film School, \$60,000** for two-year fellowships for five filmmakers.
- **Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, \$60,000** for one-year fellowships for six artists.
- **Manhattan School of Music, \$60,000** for one-year fellowships for six musicians.
- **New Dramatists, \$60,000** for two-year fellowships for three playwrights.
- **Smack Mellon Studios, \$60,000** for one-year fellowships for six artists.
- **Socrates Sculpture Park, \$60,000** for one-year fellowships for six artists.
- **Spanish Theatre Repertory, \$60,000** for two-year fellowships for three emerging directors.
- **Studio Museum in Harlem, \$40,000** for one-year fellowships for four artists.
- **Whitney Museum of American Art, \$40,000** for one-year fellowships for four artists.

## HEALTH

**Comunilife, \$100,000** to bring a program that supports and treats Latina girls who have attempted suicide to Brooklyn.

**Community Service Society of New York, \$100,000** to help the State simplify the application process for health insurance programs including Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and Family Health Plus.

**Helen Keller International, \$65,000** to screen 12,000 poor and immigrant children for vision problems in 18 middle and high schools.

**Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy, \$75,000** to strengthen and expand mental health care for Hunter College students.

**Mount Sinai School of Medicine of New York University, \$100,000** to reduce costs of palliative care and increase patient and staff satisfaction in City hospitals through a study of similar programs around the country.

**New York City AIDS Fund, \$50,000** for a group of funders who support AIDS programs.

**New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, \$125,000** to help restructure the City's public hospital system to improve its financial position.

**The Public Health Research Institute at New Jersey Medical School, \$95,000** to study a drug-resistant bacterium in four City hospitals.

**Public Health Solutions, \$100,000** to enable the City's largest provider of reproductive health services to treat more poor girls and young women.

**Special Olympics New York, \$60,000** to include children ages three to seven in a non-competitive sports program for disabled youth.

**United Hospital Fund of New York, \$100,000** to train family caregivers and improve communication between them and health care providers.

## SPECIAL PROJECTS AND PHILANTHROPY

**American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, \$50,000** to care for and reduce the number of feral cats in New York City.

## MAKING USE OF VOLUNTEERS

**New York Cares, \$165,000** to train 14 New York Civic Corps members to serve as volunteer coordinators to deal with record numbers of new volunteers. The group will also work with Fiscal Management Associates to match unemployed bankers and accountants with nonprofits in financial trouble.

**ReServe Elder Service, \$50,000** to place experienced retirees in paid positions at struggling nonprofit agencies.

**Taproot Foundation, \$100,000** for *pro bono* consultants to help 15 Civic Corps host organizations attract, manage, and retain volunteers, and create a model for other organizations.

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# GRANTS

**December 2009** NEWSLETTER

**INSIDE:**  
Stimulating  
green job growth,  
insuring hard to  
reach families,  
and putting  
Rockefeller drug  
law reforms into  
action.



With Trust support, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council provides artists with free use of empty store fronts and office space for rehearsal, studio, and performance. Here, Deborah Lohse performs "Changing Room," created by Anja Hitzenberger, in a store front on Nassau Street. Photo by Anja Hitzenberger.

The grants described in this issue were approved by The New York Community Trust's governing body at its October 2009 meeting. For grantee contact information, or for more information about the grants, please call The Trust's receptionist at 212.686.0010, ext. 0.

This issue and past newsletters can be found at [www.nycommunitytrust.org](http://www.nycommunitytrust.org).

If you'd prefer to receive our e-newsletter, please e-mail us at [newsletter@nyct-cfi.org](mailto:newsletter@nyct-cfi.org).

Most of the grants in our newsletter are made possible through the generosity of past donors who established permanent, charitable funds with us during their lifetimes or through their wills. To learn more about setting up a fund, please contact our general counsel, Jane Wilton, at 212.686.2563.