

## Welcome to the Spring 2015 Elmezzi Foundation Newsletter!

It was a long, cold winter, but our grantees kept busy with exceptional programming. This is the first 2015 issue of our bi-annual newsletters, and we are pleased to share grantee winter/spring up-dates with our community!

### Grantee Updates

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Connecticut's Bridgeport Program doubled in size, now serving 60 youths. Attendance is at 85% and 100% are on track to graduate!
- Queens Community House has added another Young Adult Borough Center to its roster of programs. QCH was also one of three honorees at this year's Queens Winter Pride Event.
- The IHDF-NY Ravenswood II program hosted a Rededication Ceremony in November 2014. Guests returned to PS 112 to celebrate the Ravenswood II Dreamers progress toward high school graduation and their pursuit of post-secondary education.

### The Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement Becomes a Community School!

The Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement was selected to be one of the NYC Department of Education Chancellor's new community schools. New York City Community Schools are meant to serve not just the students that attend them, but their surrounding community as well. In addition to providing quality educational services and material, families can access vital social services and communities can use the facilities and other resources for collaboration. The Elmezzi Foundation supported the creation and development of this school in partnership with The Urban Assembly and NYCDOE. The school's theme of civic engagement reflects Mr. Elmezzi's deep interest in this area.



### Stay Up to Date with The Elmezzi Foundation

If you enjoy hearing about our updates then follow us on Twitter, like us on Facebook, or read the news blog on our website where we post grantee updates, award recognitions, and points of general interest regularly!

## QCH Welcomes a New Executive Director

Queens Community House welcomed new Executive Director, Ben Thomases in February. Thomases had previously worked as the Executive Vice President of Seedco, a national nonprofit organization that advances economic opportunity for people, businesses and com-

munities in need. Prior, Thomases had worked in the NYC Mayor's Office as the first Food Policy Coordinator for the City of New York. Thomases is only the 4th Executive Director to lead QCH, and succeeded Irma E. Rodriguez, who had been with the organization since 1983.



*New QCH Executive Director Ben Thomases (center) with Queens Borough President Melinda Katz (left) and outgoing Executive Director Irma Rodriguez (right).*



*Elmezzzi Foundation Executive Director, PS 234Q Vice Principal, students and family members all participate in a Hip Hop dance workshop.*

## Alvin Ailey Kids Make the News!

On April 30 Alvin Ailey hosted a Family Fun Night at PS234Q that was covered by both The Queens Chronicles as well as The Queens Times. The event was open to parents and family members of the students where they were encouraged to participate in the dances. The event was also a culmination of the an Alvin Ailey residency program at PS34Q where more than 100 third grade students were given over 48 hours of in-school instruction learning West African and Hip Hop dance routines. Both the in-school program and the Family Fun night were funded by The Elmezzzi Foundation.

## The First Cohort of Dreamers Graduate High School and Perpare for College

For the past decade, The Elmezzzi Foundation has supported the "I Have A Dream" Foundation NY Ravenswood II program. This year the first cohort of students we began sponsoring as third graders back in 2005/2006 will graduate from high school. Even better, all of the eligible students in the program have been accepted to college!

The Dreamers (as students of the Ravenswood II program are known) will be attending schools ranging from the CUNY and SUNY systems, to out-of-state public and private universities, and even an Ivy League! Dreamers will continue to receive support from The Elmezzzi Foundation and the IHDF-NY Program Directors during their college trajectory.



*Program Director Karlisle Honore helps a Dreamer with her college application.*

We are extremely proud of everything these Dreamers have accomplished and couldn't be more excited for the new journeys they will embark on and milestones they will achieve!

## Fundraising Success!

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Connecticut held their annual Bowl for Kids Sake Event in April where they managed to bring in over \$200 bowlers and raised \$51,000!
- IHDF-NY utilized a College Access Challenge Grant from NY HESC in the amount of \$22,143 to conduct a three day college trip for more than 60 New York Dreamers that included visits to Alfred University, Fredonia State College, University at Buffalo, Buffalo State University, Syracuse University, and Oneonta State College.

## Awards and Recognitions



2015 “Queens Community Builder” Awardee Clara Monroe with David Andersson and Joseph Hennessy, previous winners of the award.



Sister Tesa Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Hour Children receiving the faith-based humanitarian Opus Prize last fall.

**Clara Monroe** was awarded the **2015 “Queens Community Builder Award”** at Queens Community House’s Spring Benefit on April 9th. The award was established in 2013 by QCH’s Board of Directors and is given annually to a Queens resident who “has made a dedicated effort to unite neighbors of all backgrounds, embodying what is best about the borough.” Ms. Monroe was recognized for her efforts to initiate a volunteer-led farmers market and inter-generational urban garden at the Pomonok Houses in Flushing and for founding a nonprofit (Kings and Queens) that encourages local children to read and to help build their confidence.

**Sister Tesa Fitzgerald**, Executive Director of Hour Children, was awarded the \$1 million **Opus Prize** last year for faith-based humanitarian work. Hour children focuses on assisting formerly incarcerated women and their children in improving their lives and reconnecting. Upon receiving the prize Sister Tesa was recognized for the gravity of her work, given that incarceration, particularly for people of color, is occurring en masse and in record numbers, making it one of the most significant social issues of our time. Hour Children responds to the needs of both parents and children in order to provide social uplift for those affected.

## Get Your High School Equivalency Diploma at Queens Library!

This year, 140 adults are earning their High School Equivalency Diplomas after taking classes from the Queens Library Adult Learning Center — including The Jeanne Elmezzi Adult Learning Center at the Long Island City Library. Each year, close to 5,000 adult learners study for 40 weeks of classes learning ESOL, ABE, and Pre-HSE curriculum to advance their educations.



Hour Children Food Pantry Exterior

## Did You Know?

**Hour Children’s Community Food Pantry** fed more than 8000 people last year, which is an increase of more than 50% from the previous year. In addition, more than half of food recipients were children. Hour Children’s Food Pantry is now open three days a week - Monday, Thursday, and Friday.

## The Debate on Higher Education

By Pooja O'Hanlon, Executive Director and David Meehan, Admin. Assistant

Based on the mission and focus of the Elmezzi Foundation, we spend a fair amount of time thinking of education and the role it can play in improving peoples' lives, including higher education. Access to good education has the ability to expose students to new cultures, new thinking, advance careers or achieve economic stability/independence. Recently, we have come across two lines of debate as they relate to higher education—college is expensive and is four-year college for all and if so, is the cost worth it?

A recent article<sup>1</sup> weighed the burden that college expenses can have on a family where it discussed a notable NYC family, namely that of the current mayor de Blasio. The article highlights that even the Mayor's family, affluent by most standards, will still be burdened by the extreme costs of higher education (Mr. de Blasio's son will be attending Yale as a freshman). "Mr. de Blasio is paid \$225,000 as mayor, and the family receives tens of thousands of dollars in rental income from two properties in Park Slope, Brooklyn... yet the de Blasio family's argument for aid would not be unreasonable, according to financial aid experts."

College tuition is becoming costly with private institutions capping off at up to \$50k, \$60k, and \$70k a year, driving more students and their families into exorbitant

amounts of debt. Even attending a public school, which are typically less expensive than private universities, does not prevent a student from acquiring tens of thousands of dollars' worth of debt. The reasons behind this national phenomenon of enormous student debt are numerous, however, a recent report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office<sup>2</sup> notes that a leading cause of increasing tuition prices and student debt is a lack of state funding for public institutions. In recent years tuition revenue has increasingly become the top single source of revenue for public colleges.

At the Elmezzi Foundation we support the evidence that higher education benefits all. Our work has shown that for many low-income families it is often a viable means to breakout of the cycle of poverty. The question that comes up is whether at-risk students are really capable of completing a four year degree. The answer is yes. A recent article<sup>3</sup> discussed two studies that conclude "enrolling in a four-year college brings large benefits to marginal students". The article also states that college education not only benefits but pays off in the world we live in today.

Many low-income students are often first time college goers in their family and need all the support and resources they need to succeed in college, especially in their first year. They also need to be matched to colleges that provide the right environment for them to thrive. President Obama is exploring com

munity college for all, which is an important direction; however, it remains to be seen whether it encourages those on the margins to enroll, attend and graduate from college.

There are also other benefits of college education such as lower unemployment rate, better jobs, and the potential for healthier, happier and more engaged lives. With this in mind, we have been supporting the "I Have a Dream" Foundation - NY: Ravenswood II Program for almost a decade now. Having sponsored a group of 60 third graders at the onset of the program, we are excited that our first big cohort of eligible Dreamers will be attending college as freshman this fall. The colleges range from CUNY and SUNY schools to private colleges and universities. After taking the students through an in-depth college enrollment and matching process, including financial aid application and assistance, the staff at the Ravenswood II Program is presently thinking about systems and supports the students will need to succeed in the first year of college and beyond. Based on our deep involvement with the program we know that the students will graduate with little or no debt.

We couldn't be more proud to see that not only is our work aligned with current evidence in the field but also espouses our Foundation's mission and philosophy. For us, there is no debate.

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1. Flegenheimer, Matt and Michael Grynbaum. n.d. "Mayor de Blasio's New Challenge: Paying for 2 Children in College" New York Times. (<http://nyti.ms/1e5j6Aa>)

2. "Higher Education: State Funding Trends and Policies on Affordability." U.S. Government Accountability Office. (<http://1.usa.gov/1sGFctt>)

3. Leonhardt, David. 2015. "College for the Masses." The New York Times (<http://nyti.ms/1z88kCQ>)