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DHS, DOE, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, CAMBA AND NYC SERVICE JOIN WITH SCHOLASTIC TO BRING “STORY PLAY” TO KIDS AT NYC SHELTERS

Partners join forces in on-going initiative to promote literacy and increase reading programs for homeless New York City families

NEW YORK— This morning, several New York City Department of Homeless Services families gathered at the **Flagstone Family Center** – a Brooklyn homeless facility for families with children – to participate in a new reading program designed to increase literacy through access to age-appropriate books with newly built libraries in each shelter, shelving hundreds of books. This initiative between **DHS, the New York City Department of Education, Scholastic, CAMBA, NYC Service** and the **New York Public Library**, encourages young children to enjoy reading, as well as teaches parents the skills necessary to read to, and interact with, their children.



Librarian Odette Larroche-Garcia reads to children and parents.

The event was part of a larger initiative, the DHS Family Shelter Library Pilot Project – a collaboration among DHS’ Office of Public/Private Partnerships, the DHS Department of Families with Children, CAMBA, NYC Service, New York Public Library and Scholastic Inc. Together, they have created a total of 30 libraries in Families with Children shelters throughout the city. Scholastic Inc. has donated over 3,000 books to facilitate the creation of the libraries, with New York Public Libraries providing programming in these shelter-based reading rooms.

As part of the initiative, and to celebrate the launch of this program at Flagstone Family Center, the various partners celebrated with a “Story Play” read along hosted by Brooklyn Public Library Outreach Associate, **Odette Larroche-Garcia**, and **Clifford the Big Red Dog®**. The ceremony kicked off with an introduction from several of the partners and was followed by a reading of Scholastic’s *How Do Dinosaurs Count to Ten?*, by author Jane Yolen and illustrator Mark Teague, as well as snack, playtime, and a book giveaway provided by Scholastic.

“The Department of Homeless Services is sincerely thankful for Scholastic’s additional book donation to expand our Family Shelter library Pilot by 10 new libraries, growing from 20 shelters to 30 shelters since September 2015” said **DHS First Deputy Commissioner, Lorraine Stephens**. “Our goal is to continue to foster a strong culture of literacy for our families by providing them a greater quantity and variety of books and linkages to the local libraries.”

(More)

“We have both the obligation and the great privilege to introduce all children in our city to the wonderful world of books,” said **DOE Deputy Chancellor Phil Weinberg**. “This donation to the Flagstone Family Center and other family shelters will allow us to do just that.”

“As the mother of a toddler I see how reading to my child sparks her imagination. Books can take the reader to faraway lands, introduce new characters, present dilemmas, and consequences to choices. Reading can expand horizons beyond a local environment. Books that are easily accessible to young readers provide a fun option to fill free time while strengthening academic skills,” said **Assemblywoman Latrice Walker** (D-55). “I thank all the partners who collaborated to launch ‘Story Play’ in Brownsville.”

“CAMBA and the staff and residents of Flagstone Family Center are delighted with the Story Play program and grateful to all of our partners for making it possible: DHS, Scholastic, New York City Service and the Brooklyn Public Library,” said **Joanne M. Oplustil, President and CEO of CAMBA**. “We know that reading to children from infancy enhances brain development and literacy skills. Story Play will have a lifelong impact on Flagstone children by teaching them at an early age to love books and by encouraging parents to read with their children.”

“NYC Service echoes the Department of Homeless Services’ gratitude and thanks to Scholastic for their generous donation of more than 3,000 books to NYC Family Shelters,” said **Paula Gavin, Chief Service Officer of NYC Service**. “City Leaders, as well as mothers like Wendy, understand that literacy and service are the pillars of early childhood development. We hope that this initiative will cultivate the next generation of great leaders in our City. NYC Service thanks all the City agencies and CBO partners who make this partnership successful for the families we are serving.”

“At Scholastic, we have seen first-hand that a book can be life-changing in the hands of a child,” shared **Karine Apollon, VP & General Manager, Scholastic Education**. “The right book at the right time can light an emotional spark within children that motivates them to read and realize themselves. Scholastic is proud to work with the Department of Homeless Services, CAMBA, the Department of Education, NYC Service and the Brooklyn Public Library with whom we share a dedication to increase access to books for all of our City’s children, ensuring that they live their lives as readers.”

“Brooklyn Public Library is proud to serve the diverse needs of a diverse borough—and when families cannot reach us, we will bring our collections and programs to them,” said **Nick Higgins, Director of Outreach Services for Brooklyn Public Library**. “By partnering with agencies like DHS, we are able to serve the community beyond our 60 branches, ensuring that families from every walk of life can access our free, life-transforming resources.”

“Instead of sitting at home in front of a TV, I can bring the children down to Story Play. I love watching them interact with the librarian and other children – you can see them develop,” said **Wendy Gonzales**, a Flagstone mother who attends the program with Enrique, 8 months and Legend, 2. “Story Play teaches you how to read and be interactive with children, making sounds and actions to bring a book to life.”

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