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Borough President Diaz launches Bronx Youth Corps

By Arthur Cusano



Photo by Jordan Guerra, WHEDco

Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. hosted the Bronx Youth Corps first-ever ‘Day of Service, Thursday, October 13 at Railroad Park in Melrose, likely the first of many to come.

Students from two Bronx schools, DreamYard Prep High School and M.S. 390, participated in the event, in partnership with volunteers from DreamYard Art Center.

They planted 500 daffodils at the site of a new student-made park mural.

Diaz first announced the creation of the Bronx Youth Corps in his State of the Borough address in February.

The new program was created with the belief that residents are never too young to contribute to their neighborhood and their community, he said.

“We need more young people like the Bronx Youth Corps student volunteers, students who want to be engaged in the world around them and who want to make a difference in the lives of others,” Diaz said.

“I commend these students for creating such a program. They say that you lead by example, and these wonderful students are setting a great example for their peers to become more active within their community,” he added.

The impetus is to provide middle school and high school students with a quality service learning experience to help them grow as individuals and leaders through service learning, as well as classroom learning, said Diaz’s director of Policy, Victoria Reing.

“A key component of the Youth Corp is classroom service learning education that complements the service projects,” Reing said.

Students are selected by the schools to participate in the program.

While the program is currently open exclusively to DreamYard Prep High School and M.S. 390 students, there are plans to expand the program to other schools that express interest.

DreamYard is the community partner responsible for running the new program.

In addition to running DreamYard Prep, a public high school with a heavy arts focus, as well as a community center, they also work with 45 schools to provide arts and social justice programming.

“We’ve had a relationship with the Bronx borough president for many years and when he had this idea he asked us to jump in because we work with so many other non-profits,” explained DreamYard co-executive director Jason Duchen.

Another non-profit, Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation, or WHEDco, will also be taking part in the programs at some point.

Duchen said students have expressed interest in four topics they want to concentrate on in the future: environmental justice, violence in the community, community beautification and gentrification.

While those topics can be controversial and opinions often fall along party lines, he said he was not worried about getting students involved in political discussions.

“It’s impossible not to be political in the world,” Duchen said. “I think the borough president and the politicians have to worry about that. What we’re interested in is how do we make sure the young people are thinking actively about the community that they live and learn in and have active, exciting conversations about how to make that community democratic, free and safe.”

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