



[The BronxWorks October 2021 Newsletter](#)

Back to School Edition

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[Back to School 2021: Early Lessons and Challenges](#)



The 2021-2022 school year is well underway! New York City schools are back in-person, full-time, as are BronxWorks Children & Youth after-school programs. While there is a renewed sense of normalcy, myriad new challenges are present in this second full year of school in the COVID-19 world. BronxWorks continues to make adjustments to operate safely within the parameters of the ongoing recovery. This month we asked members of the BronxWorks Children & Youth leadership team to talk about how the year started and what they've already learned.

For starters – how are things going?



Dina Brown, Program Director, Middle School Programs:

It's been very interesting for us. We're seeing record-breaking enrollment numbers compared to previous years, even pre-COVID years. Rate of participation is very high. Students are here and they're staying. Parents want them in the program. The students want to socialize outside of their normal academic day, be outside, have fun, and interact with other humans. They also appreciate the academic support that we provide, which is important as some have fallen behind during COVID. We have daily health screenings for everyone who comes in and safety monitors for each classroom. We allow some time for students to step out of the room, and take a breath in their own space.

Kiesha Roberts, Assistant Department Director, Cornerstone Programs:

Our students love being in the after-school program, many of them don't want to leave at the end of the day. I think that is because the program offers so much. We recognize that COVID is still a major factor, but we do our best to keep the students safe while providing engaging activities. Thanks to the support of our funders, we are offering a lot of STEM activities, including experiments, robotics, and programming. Students are always asking what is coming up and they are excited for the return of the Halloween party. Of course, we



practice social distancing in our centers, which means we must limit the number of kids we can enroll. Everyone who comes into the center must follow safety protocols. We also had to restructure some activities to have them individualized.



**Aremni Francisco, Program Director,
Jill Chaifetz Transfer School:**

Students are definitely excited to be back in the building. They've missed social interactions with each other and staff. For those that are experiencing difficulties, we have mental health clinicians on site. We're able to get students back into therapy sessions as some students weren't comfortable doing telehealth. Events have to be downsized and socially distanced, but we're happy to offer them again. Naturally, we screen and monitor all visitors to the school.



**Can you tell us about some early challenges the programs
are experiencing?**

**Melinda Barr, Assistant Department Director,
Early Child Care and Elementary Education:**

Programs for elementary age children are struggling with enrollment. Some families have expressed concern about the rise of the COVID Delta variant, some have left the area, and others no longer need the after-school service. It's also different this year as we had to restructure our drop-off and pick-up procedures due to social distancing guidelines. Parents are not allowed to enter and visit the program. Pre-COVID, parents could visit and engage in the classroom while helping their child transition from one setting to the other. Parent engagement is key to our programs, and now we work hard to engage the parents using a variety of methods, including sharing pictures of their work and other projects online.





What are your goals for your programs this year? Are they different than in previous years?

Kiesha:

My goals have evolved. One of my main goals was to bring more technology to the programs, and when COVID hit, it kind of forced us in that direction. Now, I want to refocus on the social-emotional piece. I want the students and the Cornerstone team to be more sensitive in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We want to help our participants and staff be more understanding, have more respect for each other and for themselves, and learn acceptance of and interest in diversity.

Dina:

Our goals are always to provide academic and social-emotional support for our students. Our centers need to be a safe and open space for our students to feel comfortable enough to share their feelings, think through solutions, and build leadership skills. Particularly for this year, we really want to understand where our kids are at and meet them there. Personally, I plan to meet with every student by organizing small weekly meetings with different groups. I really want to have a conversation with each of them so they know that BronxWorks is here to support them in whatever they need.

Aremni:

Our goals vary heavily from student to student, but we want to strongly focus on the mental health aspect for all of our participants. Remote learning was not conducive for working on the social-emotional aspect, and now that we're back to full-time in-person programming, we want to resume that piece heavily. We want to bring back groups where students can get together with an advisor and bond together. We also want to address the needs of our families. We know many families are food insecure, and this year we want to make sure we can continue to assist them or provide referrals.

Melinda:

Our goal for this year is ensuring that our early childhood programs are fully enrolled and that children's needs are being met socially, emotionally, and academically. We strive to prepare the students to develop in a changing environment. The goal is for children to leave our care ready for the next stage of their development. To transition successfully, children need confidence in their own abilities, and readiness to pursue new adventures.

Staff Profile:
Zachary Smith

So often at BronxWorks, staff come from different professional backgrounds and make a choice to pursue a career in social services. Zachary Smith, Program Coordinator at BronxWorks, fits that persona, motivated purely by an innate drive to give back.



Zachary Smith, Program Coordinator,
CMCC SONYC After-School

Zachary grew up in Westchester County and studied Business Administration and Marketing at Morgan State University in Maryland. Later on, he transferred to and graduated from Monroe College and initially worked in his field of study. Eventually, an opportunity allowed him to shift into social services.

“The business world just didn’t appeal to me, sitting in front of your computer all day doing the exact same thing over and over again; then a door opened for me where I could be pushing forward for something better.”

Zachary worked for the City of White Plains where he helped run an after-school program and a neighborhood services department. In 2016, he joined BronxWorks as a Youth Worker at the Classic Cornerstone Community Center, later moving to the Betances Cornerstone Community Center as a Leadership Specialist and Community Liaison. Today, Zachary is the Program Coordinator at the Carolyn McLaughlin Community Center SONYC After-School Program, which provides after-school and summer programming for over 40 middle school students. In his role, Zachary also supervises four team members as part of his duties.

“Through talking with the students on their level and listening to them, I can bring them programming that they like to do so they know they really have someone here that cares.”

Outside of work, Zachary likes to play video games. “I’m just like these youth, you can’t be too old for video games.” We asked him what games he plays and he said, “NBA 2K is always number one.” He also loves playing basketball on the court, as well as coaching and mentoring others in his favorite sport. Zachary loves to spend time with family and read philosophy books.

Did You Know? BronxWorks Executive Director Eileen Torres Honored as a member of Crain's 2021 Notable Hispanic Leaders and Executives



Congratulations, Eileen!

CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS
NOTABLE HISPANIC LEADERS AND EXECUTIVES LIST

Crain's New York Business named BronxWorks Executive Director Eileen Torres to their Notable Hispanic Leaders and Executives List! Pick up a copy of Crain's New York Business today or read the segment [here](#).

Photo Essay



BronxWorks Early Childhood Learning Center Presents

"Dad Take Your Child To School Day"

The BronxWorks Early Childhood Learning Center at 1472 Montgomery Ave. invited the students' dads into the classroom for a special day. Dads engaged in projects together with the children. One of the projects helped dads and their children learn more about accessing and explaining feelings more openly with each other. The goal of the event is to create positive emotional role models for the children.



Twin Parks West Food Pantry Celebrates One Year

The BronxWorks team at Twin Parks West celebrated the one-year anniversary of their weekly food pantry. In the first few months of the pandemic, the Twin Parks West office, which specializes in employment services, noticed an increasing need for food among residents. The team started connecting residents to food resources however they could, and officially launched the weekly food pantry in October 2020. To read more about the story, click [here](#).



(L-R) Carlos Acosta, Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinator; Rachel Gill, BronxWorks Director of Community Health Programs; Carolina Espinosa, BronxWorks Program Director, SNAP-Ed



BronxWorks Leadership Council Members
(L-R) Oliver Dirks, Chair Kate Machan, Wendy Koranteng, Neelima Panoli

St. Mary's Park Completes Phase 2 of Construction

St. Mary's Park marked the completion of Phase 2 of construction on the park

BronxWorks Leadership Council Happy Hour

The BronxWorks Leadership Council, a group of committed people who bring

with the opening and dedication of the Gil Scott-Heron Amphitheater, named for the Bronx-based soul and jazz poet. BronxWorks organizes many events at the park, working to get the Bronx active with Community Health events. We were excited to be invited to this dedication and look forward to the complete remodel of the park in the coming months.

unique skills, connections, and knowledge to the Agency, held a happy hour at The Craftsman in Harlem. Council members, BronxWorks staff, and friends gathered in-person for the first time since 2019! BronxWorks is fortunate to have so many diverse professionals interested in contributing to the Agency's efforts. Learn more about the Leadership Council [here](#).

BronxWorks is thrilled to be a charity partner in the 2021 TCS New York City Marathon on Sunday, November 7.



The marathon is just about one week away! Meet our runners and help them reach their fundraising goals [here](#). Fundraising efforts are supporting the BronxWorks Children & Youth Department.

Help Support BronxWorks

There are many ways you can support BronxWorks.

- Make a contribution. [Donate Now!](#)
- **Giving Tuesday, the Global Day of Giving, is November 30.** Subscribe to BronxWorks social media below for updates on our Giving Tuesday campaign.
- Purchase essential items for our participants from our [Amazon Wishlist](#)
- Support the [Leadership Council Holiday Gift Drive!](#)
- Setup an Amazon Smile account and [choose BronxWorks](#) as your charity and Amazon will donate on your behalf every time you make purchase

[Visit our Website](#)



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