



WHEDCo Housing and Educational Activities

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By Howard Giske

One of the organizations active in the Morrisania section of the Bronx, is WHEDCo, the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation, a non-profit organization active with children and education. It utilizes the rehabilitated Morrisania Hospital building, located at 50 East 168th Street, where there is housing for 132 low-income families, also known as the "Urban Horizons I" housing and a medical clinic.

WHEDCo was founded and is headed by Nancy Biberman, whom I interviewed. Ms. Biberman is most excited about the new affordable housing that her organization has under construction in East Morrisania, by Intervale Ave. and Louis Nine Blvd. Tenants will be chosen by lottery in March 2008. "There will be 46 apartments for young people that are aging out of foster care, and 128 apartments for families. It's a combination of all affordable, and one hundred-percent green, from top to bottom, including a green roof and all the other elements that make a building green, and we're wiring every apartment for high speed internet, so every family has a computer at home and training on how to use it. The goal is to "save money on energy costs, and also bridge the digital divide," said Biberman. WHEDCo will be replacing all the appliances in its older complex, with energy efficient ones, and replacing the light bulbs with fluorescent bulbs.

WHEDCo's Headstart child development program serves 104 pre-school children. The program has well-organized class rooms and active children, of ages 3 – 5. There has been a real shift over the last year towards a population of children from Sub-Saharan Africa. Parents, who often speak little English, are participating in family literacy programs. WHEDCo also works with students from the neighboring PS/MS 218, and at PS 2 and 96, near where the new buildings are being built. Children participate in everything from sports to playing chess. There are community projects, such as collecting money for anti-retroviral drugs for people in Kenya. The children also do an advocacy project of some kind. Last year, a group of young girls aged 12 and 13 worked regarding bringing in sex education into the schools, an issue that concerned them.

WHEDCo has a home daycare micro-enterprise program, to train women to run safe home day care centers. They teach classes in English and Spanish. About 180 women are trained and doing this, caring for 1100 children and having revenues of \$8-million last year. Ms Biberman looks at this as a real "community development grand slam" since it provides jobs, and the ability of working parents to get safe and affordable day care. There is also the Kitchen Incubator program, which helps small-scale New

York food manufacturers to make and package their products. Businesses using the facilities include Munchies' Cookies, which sells baked goods at Whole Foods Supermarket, as well as delis in the area, including vegan products (using no milk, or eggs). Another manufacturer bakes empanadas. For more information, contact WHEDCo at 718-839-1100, or go to www.whedco.org.