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BronxWorks vols share their joys

BronxWorks (formerly the Citizens Advice Bureau) hosted a volunteer appreciation event on Thursday, October 21, at its Main Community Center at 1130 Grand Concourse. The gathering featured volunteers from the Girls Scouts, the Immaculate Conception Church of Astoria, Manna of Life Ministries, Monroe College, New York Cares, and the Riverdale Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture. BronxWorks executive director Carolyn McLaughlin spoke at the event and staff led tours through the building, which is one of 30 service locations.

"We are very grateful to have a group of such dedicated people," said McLaughlin.

Pete Gonzalez was one of four Manna of Life volunteers who spoke. "Our volunteer efforts with the street homeless are a labor of love," he said. "It is a joy to spend time with and to console people in need. The meals we prepare are not as important as the opportunities for dialogue and fellowship."

Faye and Mike Lieman along with Diana Minos represented the volunteers from the Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture who have provided beds for

the street homeless, as does the Immaculate Conception Church, which was represented by John Sarro. Beth Lehman along with Neela and Chip Chipalkatty were among the New York Cares volunteers who read bedtime stories to children at the transitional housing complexes run by BronxWorks. Recreation coordinator Roselie Aviles noted that New York Cares has provided scores of volunteers since the mid-1990s.

Ronnett Hall, a student at Monroe College, said serving as a volunteer ESL instructor in the BronxWorks Even Start program was very rewarding. "You can see very quickly how what you do makes a difference," she said.

Evelyn Pena, a Girl Scouts volunteer, and Sonia Hernandez-Rodriguez, a volunteer at the River Park Towers site, echoed those sentiments. "My two children have grown up at this center. They are in college now, but I encourage them to give back and I do so as well."

Ms. Hernandez-Rodriguez described her volunteering at the River Park Towers seniors program as "rewarding" and "fulfilling."