

Neighborhood voices

Collaboration is key to youth initiative

By Carolyn McLaughlin
Executive director of BronxWorks

This summer, Mayor Bloomberg launched the Young Men's Initiative, which has aptly been described as "the most comprehensive effort to tackle the broad disparities" affecting black and Latino men ages 18

to 24. This partnership, which brings together resources from the Bloomberg administration with those in the philanthropy, direct service and policy advocacy fields, has led to the creation of an action plan that promises to yield substantive results.

In communities throughout the city, young black and Latino males are 50 per-

cent more likely to live in poverty than their white or Asian counterparts. Nine out of 10 have participated in or been victims of a violent crime.

In the Bronx, their situation is still worse.

Four in 10 Bronx youth drop out
(Continued on page 3)

Neighborhood voices

Collaboration is key to youth initiative

(Continued from page 2)

of high school. Of those who stay in school or return to get a GED, a mere 15 percent enroll in college. The Bronx leads the city when it comes to several measures of family instability, including children placed in foster care, reports of abuse or neglect and the number of seriously emotionally disturbed children. Bronx neighborhoods lead the city when it comes to teen pregnancy rates and cases of pediatric HIV/AIDS.

Given this backdrop, BronxWorks applauds Mayor Bloomberg for the Young Men's Initiative, which we believe is timely and will yield observable results. We hope that the initiative's action plan includes a major role for Bronx-based organizations, in particular borough-based settlement houses (of which BronxWorks is one), which target young people as well as families, and frontline youth service providers.

While the Young Men's Initiative offers opportunity and, the details lie in the action plan. Just as roles have been clearly defined for the Department of Education, the Department of Probation and the Center for Economic Opportunity, a role for neighborhood-based direct service organizations

must be determined as well.

The Bloomberg administration has spearheaded several poverty eradication efforts in recent years that involve several city agencies, the corporate and philanthropic sectors, and service providers. These include Jobs Plus, the Conditional Cash Transfer program, the Young Adult Internship Program and the Summer Youth Employment Program. The Young Men's Initiative should build on these efforts and include a research component that documents its success, as well as provides a guidebook for regional, national or even international replication.

Collaboration must continue as the initiative moves into the implementation phase. Locally based organizations like BronxWorks can and must play a decisive role.

Founded in 1972 as the Citizens Advice Bureau, BronxWorks' mission is to help individuals and families to improve their economic and social wellbeing. More information is available at www.bronxworks.org.

Have an opinion on issues of concern to Mott Haven, Melrose and Port Morris. Neighborhood Voices welcomes your submissions.