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East Orange YMCA Partners with The Bridge to Teach Resiliency Skills to Preschoolers

EAST ORANGE (Oct. X, 2019) – The East Orange YMCA has teamed up with The Bridge, a behavioral health organization in Essex County, to teach preschoolers and kindergarteners skills to cope with challenges as they grow.

The Turrell Fund recently awarded the East Orange YMCA \$25,000 to empower children enrolled in the YMCA’s **Early Learning Scholars Program** at the city’s Althea Gibson Early Childhood Academy.

Resiliency skills are universally beneficial for children, but especially in communities faced with socioeconomic challenges. “Studies have shown that when you teach children coping skills at a young age, you can help them to make healthier choices and manage stressors more effectively later in life,” The Bridge CEO Lou Schwarcz said.

“This is a creative and important partnership, bringing two well-established and highly trusted community organizations to the table in service to the children of East Orange and their families,” East Orange YMCA Executive Director James Forde said. The YMCA has been accredited by the New Jersey School Age Child Care Association since 2006.

“We’re very excited by the prospect of working with the East Orange YMCA, as we share a vision and philosophy,” Schwarcz said.

The Bridge has extensive experience providing mental health services in schools, taking a whole-child approach that addresses behavioral, academic, emotional, and/or social challenges.

The Bridge’s Peace Model Project, a comprehensive elementary school counseling program embedded within the Caldwell-West Caldwell Public Schools, helps children

grow the skills necessary to successfully work through conflict, build self-esteem and develop coping skills, Schwarcz said.

“Collaborating with The Bridge allows us to leverage their expertise,” Forde said.

The YMCA has hired a professional clinician to supervise the after-school program at the Althea Gibson Early Childhood Academy, with oversight provided by The Bridge. The clinician will observe the 35 children and develop individual plans as needed. Three counselors from The Bridge will also train the after-school program’s staff in effective methods for addressing behavioral issues and promoting the children’s skill-building.

The program’s goal is to teach children to regulate their feelings, work out conflicts, and ask for help when they need it, Forde said.

At parents’ request, The Bridge will help them connect with family counseling and other community services, Schwarcz said. “Some families may want services beyond the after-school environment.”

The YMCA and The Bridge will track the impact of the initiative. “We’re hoping this can become a model for other schools and after-school sites that can benefit,” Forde said.

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ABOUT THE Y

Established in 1885, the Metropolitan YMCA of the Oranges invests in its diverse communities to promote wellness, safety and quality of life for children, adults and seniors. Its seven branches in East Orange, Livingston, Maplewood, Hackensack, Hardyston, Stillwater and Wayne are committed to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility through an array of programs. Some 35,000 people belong to the Metro Y, which awards more than \$2.8 million annually in direct and indirect financial assistance.

ABOUT THE BRIDGE

We are a private, nonprofit community organization that has been helping families in the Essex County area since 1971. Individual, group and family counseling are offered by culturally diverse, skilled professional staff in the areas of mental health and substance abuse. We are accredited by the New Jersey Department of Human Services to provide drug and alcohol treatment services to adolescents and adults. Our funding support comes from federal, state, county and municipal government sources as well as private philanthropic support from individuals, foundations and corporations.