



New York Seniors4Kids: Raising Our Voices for Quality Pre-k



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We dedicate this report to every older adult in New York who gives a voice to children who cannot advocate for themselves.

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Introduction

In New York, older adults care about high-quality pre-kindergarten education. From the former New York City mayor who recognizes that investments in pre-k reap benefits for all taxpayers to the grandmother of five who sees firsthand the benefits of early education in the lives of her grandchildren; from the former state senator who knows that quality pre-k reduces crime and produces responsible citizens to the paramedic who sees the lack of access to quality early education as an academic emergency – these older adults recognize pre-k as a strong foundation for academic and lifelong success. They also recognize that greater access to quality early education is in the best interest of all generations. Pre-k stimulates New York's economy and promotes the state's long-term fiscal health. By mobilizing widespread bipartisan support for high-quality pre-k, older adults are standing up for New York's children and their communities.

Seniors understand that few public policy options guarantee returns as tangible as high-quality, voluntary pre-k. Just some of the benefits include:

1. Children who attend high-quality pre-k score better on standardized tests, require fewer special education services, are less likely to repeat a grade, and more likely to graduate from high school.¹
2. Children who attend high-quality pre-k are less likely to commit crimes and become teen parents.²
3. Adults who attended pre-k programs as children are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes.³
4. Pre-k programs produce a more competitive and capable future workforce and promote long-term fiscal stability and solvency of Social Security.⁴

New York lawmakers have demonstrated a commitment to pre-k previously. In 1997, legislation passed that laid out a plan to offer voluntary pre-k for all four-year-olds through the state's 677 school districts, placing New York at the forefront of the universal pre-k movement. In 2007, the governor and legislative leadership declared a renewed commitment to the decade-old goal of pre-k for all.



Photo credit: Vincent O'Hara

Yet today, the New York State Education Department estimates that only 43% of the state's four-year-olds will attend public pre-k. Per-child funding allocations vary by district. In most cases, they are only sufficient to support half-day services that are difficult for working families to access and transportation costs are not covered. As a result, many districts do not request their full allocations. Implementation has sputtered, leaving children underserved. With New York at the center of the nation's financial collapse and state budget gaps projected, the urgent needs of families require innovative leadership now to expand access to pre-k for more children using no and low-cost solutions. Making disbursements of pre-k funds more flexible and efficient must become a legislative priority.

Now is the time for older adults in New York to champion the cause of high-quality pre-k and encourage their public officials to help New York now and in the future. Pre-k programs stabilize communities by employing people, encouraging the purchase of goods and services, and keeping parents in their jobs. Over time, pre-k investments promote savings in government programs, boost revenues, and contribute to New York's long-term fiscal security. With children unable to vote on these issues, older adults can mobilize their skills and experience to demonstrate that pre-k has broad public support around the state.

The number of older adults in New York is on the rise. In about 10 years, 7 million New Yorkers will be age 50 or older. Experiencing longer periods of healthy and active retirement or “encore” careers, older adults represent a significant resource for New York’s children and communities. In a recent national survey by MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures, older adults indicated their top reasons for volunteering include helping others, making a difference, and contributing to causes they care about. They are also concerned about leaving the world a better place for future generations. Civic engagement in causes such as high-quality, voluntary pre-k for every child in New York offers them opportunities to be more active in their communities, continue learning, and enjoy rewarding intergenerational experiences. This kind of advocacy not only helps children and society, but offers personal benefits related to better physical and mental health as well.⁵

Because of their desire to give back, a diverse group of older adults are championing the cause for quality early education. Through Generations United’s Seniors4Kids initiative, older adults are encouraging public officials to expand New York’s preschool programs to include all three- and four-year-old children and ensure adequate funding for quality programs. To achieve this end, senior advocates promote collaboration among schools, community-based programs, private operators, and Head Start to expand preschool while supporting quality child-care programs. With a rich array of personal and professional experiences, these caring older adults are uniquely positioned to help their communities. New York Seniors4Kids are raising their voices for a quality early education that benefits all generations.



Photo credit: Donna Butts

Mayor David N. Dinkins and First Lady Joyce Burrows Dinkins

David N. Dinkins once said, "I tell people I'm in charge of children, children I haven't even met yet." This sentiment continues to ring true for David and Joyce Dinkins. As part of their commitment to the state's youngest residents, the former mayor and first lady of New York City became honorary co-chairs of Seniors4Kids in New York.

Mr. and Mrs. Dinkins know that one of the best ways to help a child is to start quality education early. "We understand from personal experience that the next generation will need a sound education to prepare them for success," Mr. Dinkins says. "We are convinced of the importance of quality pre-kindergarten."

Mr. Dinkins has advocated for education since his early days in politics. Elected to the New York State Assembly in 1965, he helped to create the Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) program. It provided grants and educational assistance to students from low and moderate income families.



As mayor, Mr. Dinkins continued to champion children and education. He instituted "Safe Streets, Safe City: Cops and Kids," a model criminal justice plan that helped reduce crime and expand opportunities for the children of New York City, and established Beacon schools.

Education is a priority for Mrs. Dinkins as well, in both her personal and public life. In addition to being a mother of two and a devoted grandparent, she focused

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David and Joyce Dinkins Former Mayor and First Lady of New York City New York City, New York

David N. Dinkins is a former mayor of New York City. He currently serves as a Professor of Public Affairs at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs. He is active in a number of organizations that benefit young people, including the Association to Benefit Children and the Children's Health Fund. He can be heard on the "Dialogue with Dinkins" radio program on WLIB radio in New York City on Saturday mornings.

Joyce Burrows Dinkins is the former first lady of New York City and a native New Yorker. Prior to the election of her husband as Mayor, Mrs. Dinkins served as the

Coordinator of Metropolitan Affairs in the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. As First Lady, she promoted education, health care, and arts for children. She served as honorary chair of the Mayor's Task Force on Child Abuse, chairperson of "The First Day Back to School" campaign, and honorary chairperson of New York City's Children's Week.

The Dinkins met while earning their undergraduate degrees at Howard University and married in 1953. They have two grown children, David Jr. and Donna Dinkins-Hoggard, and two grandchildren.

on raising awareness for children's issues while serving as first lady. "For older adults like us, creating a bright and hopeful life for our children is, without question, one of our most urgent priorities," Mrs. Dinkins says. "Nothing is more fulfilling than watching young children learn, grow and develop to their fullest potential."

Mr. and Mrs. Dinkins say that improving access to pre-kindergarten is not only good for kids, it is good for all of New York. Children who attend quality pre-K go on to perform better in school, require fewer remedial services, are less likely to become pregnant as teenagers, commit fewer crimes, earn higher wages, and contribute more in tax revenues. "Few programs offer a guaranteed return as impressive as high-quality, voluntary pre-k," Mr. Dinkins says.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Dinkins stress that until every parent who wants to send their child to pre-k can access a quality program in their neighborhood, seniors can and should help make this a priority for lawmakers.

"We have had enough experiences in our life to realize what works and what doesn't. With age comes wisdom," Mrs. Dinkins says. "We call upon other older adults to get active in the fight for pre-k, and to let our leadership know just how important it is that we provide early learning for all children at a time when so many young families are struggling."



Photo credit: Sara P. Harmon

Senator John Dunne

As a member of the New York State Senate, John Dunne spent more than two decades tackling critical challenges that affected the quality of life for all Empire State citizens. He believes that one of the most powerful tools to combat crime, teen pregnancy, and high school dropout rates are quality pre-k programs that help children get the right start in life.

"I've spent most of my life working with people who have been on the fringes of society," Dunne recalls. "Many individuals unable to achieve a decent level of education come from circumstances where they really need some additional help early on in life. I saw it firsthand among youngsters caught up in family court, as well as in the criminal justice and correctional system."

During his tenure in the State Senate, Dunne played a key role in quelling the 1971 riot at Attica State Prison and served as the chair of the Senate Prisons Committee. He has given a great deal of thought and consideration to what youth need to stay on the path to success and stay out of trouble. He challenges lawmakers to make pre-kindergarten a priority because reaching children early is vital to their later achievements and contributions. Research shows that at-risk children left out of quality pre-k programs are five times more likely to commit crimes by age 27 than peers who attended them.⁶

"Most people in public office give lip service to how important education is. But they're often unaware how critically important early education is because it tackles problems at their source," Dunne says. "I resist the idea that pre-kindergarten is a baby-sitting enterprise. It starts children on the road to an education that prepares them to succeed in school, career, and life."

When he is talking about his own family, Dunne quickly changes from knowledgeable former policymaker to proud grandfather. He is amazed at his own grandchildren's capacity to learn and at how much information they absorbed from three to four years of age in pre-k.

"They have great imaginations. They're not bored. They get excitement out of little things. All of my grandchildren



enjoy learning and studying," Dunne boasts.

He hopes every family that wants to send their child to a quality early learning experience will have the same opportunities that his grandchildren did. He also believes that older adults can play a huge role in making that hope a

reality. According to Dunne, "Seniors bring wisdom, prudence and experience to the table. I think there are a lot of people in their retirement years who feel they have something to give. I think all they need is to be asked."

John Dunne Former Senator, New York State Legislature Columbia County, New York

During 24 years as a New York State Senator, John Dunne served at various times as Deputy Majority Leader and chair of the judiciary, environmental protection, insurance and prisons committees. There, he also played a key role in quelling the 1971 Attica State Prison riot. Dunne later served as the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights in the George H. W. Bush administration. He is senior counsel to the law firm of Whiteman, Osterman & Hanna based in Albany, New York. Dunne resides in northern Columbia County, New York with his wife of 51 years. They have four children and eight grandchildren. Dunne is a product of the New York State public school system.

Legislator Vivian Viloria-Fisher

In Vivian Viloria-Fisher's opinion, every child deserves a chance to succeed in life. As a result, she believes that pre-kindergarten is a vital service for the families she represents in the Suffolk County Legislature.

"Right now there is a divide among children whose families can afford to pay thousands of dollars for quality education during a critical developmental time, and those children whose families cannot," Viloria-Fisher says.

As a former English and Spanish teacher, Suffolk County Legislator Viloria-Fisher witnessed firsthand how some children lagged behind other students because their parents were not well educated, didn't understand the importance of activities like reading to their child, or worked long hours at multiple jobs that limited their available time to spend with their children.

"Universal pre-k helps to level the playing field for all children in their preparedness coming into kindergarten. It affects not only academic success but psychological and emotional growth," Viloria-Fisher explains. "A five-year-old should not have to play catch-up."

She says older adults can help make universal pre-kindergarten a higher priority for lawmakers and voters by raising their voices about the benefits of pre-k to all generations. Pre-k reduces crime, boosts high-school graduation rates, reduces teen pregnancy, lowers special education costs, and boosts taxable income.

She adds that while most seniors are finished raising children, the fight for pre-kindergarten for them is about leaving a legacy for future generations.

"It's not self interest. It's a broader interest," Viloria-Fisher says. "I believe in the long run there's a basic benefit to society, both economically and socially."

Just over half of New York's three- and four-year-olds attend either a private or public or pre-kindergarten program.⁷ Viloria-Fisher wants all children to have the same chance to succeed.



"Public schools, including pre-k programs, serve a basic and fundamental purpose in our country," Viloria-Fisher says. "They create an educated citizenry and provide every child with an equal opportunity to learn."

As a legislator, Viloria-Fisher grapples daily with the state's challenging financial realities. She knows, however, that investing in pre-k now will pay off later. "Early education has to be a right for every family."

Vivian Viloria-Fisher Deputy Presiding Honorable Legislator, Suffolk County's 5th District East Setauket, New York

Deputy Presiding Honorable Legislator Vivian Viloria-Fisher represents Suffolk County's 5th District. She serves as the Deputy Presiding Officer of the 18-person Suffolk County Legislature, chairs the Environment, Planning and Land Acquisition Committee and is Vice Chair of the Legislature's Health and Social Services Committee. She is also a member of the Labor and Affordable Housing Committee. Viloria-Fisher taught English and Spanish, both in the Middle Country and Three Village School Districts for more than 30 years. Born in the Dominican Republic, she immigrated to New York with her family as an infant. She is married to Stuart Fisher and has five children: Donna, Chris, Marc, Daniel, and Stefanie; and two grandchildren.

Dr. Jeff Bloomberg

Dr. Jeff Bloomberg has a prescription for easing the jitters that kids often get when visiting the dentist for a check-up. A high quality pre-kindergarten program offers kids more than just the three R's—reading, writing and arithmetic. It also exposes children to a lifetime of healthy habits, like dental hygiene. Early exposure helps to reduce their fears as well.

A retired dentist living in Old Chatham, New York, Bloomberg says pre-kindergarten classes in his area visited his dental office as an annual field trip. They would receive free toothbrushes and become familiar with the equipment. By the end of the day, the kids saw going the dentist as a fun adventure.

"If kids take good care of their teeth, the first visit to the dentist will usually be just a cleaning and a check-up. It is a much more pleasant experience than having to have work done," Bloomberg says. "When it's time to go to the dentist again, they want to come back."

He adds that while parents may already be teaching their kids how to brush and take care of their teeth at home, it's good if they hear that message from people in other settings as well.

In addition to benefiting a child's physical health, Dr. Bloomberg also finds that pre-k in his community opens children to new experiences that are beneficial to their emotional growth.

"I live in a rural community and we have a broad range of people, from those who are really well off to families struggling to get by," explains Bloomberg. "The great thing about pre-k is that it provides children with different backgrounds the same opportunity to engage and learn during a critical time in their development."

Bloomberg says older adults are prime candidates to promote increasing the availability and quality of pre-k in New York due to their lifestyle and the life lessons they've learned.



"Seniors make good advocates for a couple of reasons. They are often in a situation where they can spend the time doing this work, and they can draw upon a lot of valuable professional and family experiences."

Making pre-kindergarten available to every child in New York is a lot like going to the dentist for a check-up. It can be scary at first to some, but it is absolutely necessary to making our foundation strong.

Jeff Bloomberg Retired Dentist Old Chatham, New York

Dr. Jeff Bloomberg is a retired dentist who lives in Old Chatham, New York. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the New York State Adult Day Services Association and also volunteers with The Leukemia Society of America and Habitat for Humanity. Bloomberg and his wife of 46 years, Joan, have two adult daughters, Eliza and Anne. A former sled dog musher (dog team driver), he is also a United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA) Certified Teaching Professional.

Lon A. Fricano

In the 1960s, young people took to the streets, demanding equality and justice. Their philosophy could be summed up by a popular button of the day that read simply, "Give a damn." Many, like Lon Fricano, still do. This Auburn paramedic thinks baby boomers are the logical choice to fight for pre-kindergarten and other causes that will improve children's education.

"I think it's time that the baby boomers dust off their ideals, get out there and start speaking up again," Fricano says. "If we are not the ones to do it, then you tell me — who is?"

While not attending pre-kindergarten isn't the same as the life and death situations he encounters in his daily work as a paramedic, Fricano does see lack of access to quality early education as an academic emergency. He hopes his generation will resuscitate this issue in the minds of policymakers and voters in New York.

"Today we see graduation rates in the 60th-65th percentiles and nobody seems to think that's unusual," Fricano laments. "Pre-k helps prepare children to be successful students. A good pre-k program positions them to enjoy education and to be good at it."

Baby boomers are more active during their retirement years than any other generation in history. It is this drive to continue to be productive that Fricano says is another reason today's older adults make great advocates for kids.

"We have the time to pay attention," Fricano says. "At a certain point in life you have that ability to look back and see what counted, what was important and what's missing."

At the scene of an accident, Fricano and the rest of his emergency response team must react quickly and do whatever they can to help those in need. In the fight for pre-kindergarten, he hopes many others will be at his side to help stabilize our future.



"Your efforts, even though they may seem futile at times on an individual level, they're not," Fricano says. "We don't need any special training. There are no special tools needed. All that's required are some like-minded people raising their voices in a positive way to change the world and make it a better place."

Lon A. Fricano **Paramedic** **Auburn, New York**

Lon A. Fricano moved to Auburn, New York 21 years ago from Long Island. He has two grown children and works as a paramedic. Fricano has served in a variety of different roles in nonprofit organizations in his community. These contributions include 16 years with the United Way, spending half that time on their board of directors. Fricano has also served on the board of Neighborhood House, which operates an enriched day care center and offers a pre-kindergarten program to local families.

Pamela Giacoia

Anyone can sign their name to a form letter. When asked to help alert lawmakers about the importance of pre-kindergarten, older adults at the Southhampton Senior Center decided to volunteer in a classroom to see just how beneficial the program actually was. With the help of Pamela Giacoia, director of Senior Services for the Town of Southhampton, this group of volunteers - whose mean age was over 75 years old- became convinced quickly.

"It was a resounding success," says Giacoia, who also volunteers herself as a Captain4Kids. "They began to see what a real difference pre-k education could make."

The list of seniors wanting to participate in this intergenerational experience quickly grew and Giacoia recently expanded into more schools. Now even more seniors are eagerly sharing their experiences in the classroom with policymakers.

"The Captains4Kids take the time to write about what they see in the classrooms and why it is particularly important to them," Giacoia says. "They would be insulted if you just ask them to sign a form letter."

One senior tells the story of a quiet and withdrawn child who, after a nurturing pre-kindergarten experience, participates in class. Another older adult tells about a child who often cried in the classroom. Now, under the tutelage of a loving senior, she is engaged happily in classroom activities, entering the classroom each day ready to learn.

Giacoia finds that children and older adults alike benefit from the experience. With more one-on-one time with older adults, children have a more enriching learning experience. The fast-paced interaction with the kids helps to keep the minds and body of the seniors in good shape.

"The seniors fell in love with the kids and the kids fell in love with the seniors. It really is a win-win," Giacoia says.



When the Southhampton seniors reach out to lawmakers about issues that benefit children, it also helps to break the public stereotype that this demographic is only concerned about issues "like Medicare and Social Security."

"Seniors really care about younger generations. We have to invest sufficient resources for early childhood education," Giacoia says. "It's going to improve their school life and their learning for the rest of their lives. They're going to be better adults and that benefits us all."

Given the strong turnout of seniors in New York on Election Day, politicians need to hear this message.

"Children really do need adults to speak up for them. What better people than our age group?" Giacoia asks.

Pamela Giacoia **Director of Senior Services** **Southampton, New York**

Pamela Giacoia is the Director of Senior Services for the Town of Southampton, New York. Giacoia grew up in Southampton and was one of seven children in her family. She is a proud mother of five and now has five grandchildren ranging in age from one-to four-years-old.

Linda James

Linda James may not be a lawmaker, but you will frequently find this grandmother of five speaking out on behalf of children at the New York State Capitol in Albany. Her role as a children's advocate began in 1987, when James found herself in the position of raising her granddaughter who was born weighing just one pound four ounces. Two years later, she began caring for her infant grandson who was born prematurely as well. As the primary caregiver of two babies, James taught herself how to navigate a complicated kinship care system with tireless determination and found her future calling as a grandfamilies advocate.

Although her grandchildren are now grown, James still raises her voice for families in her Rochester community. She now runs a support and education group for grandparents raising grandchildren. Many of the members use the advocacy skills James has taught them, visiting Albany to speak out for children's issues – including the need for high quality pre-kindergarten.

"Many of the grandparents in our group volunteer with Seniors4Kids," explains James. With everything that is on their plates, they take the time to contact lawmakers, write letters to the editor and educate others about pre-kindergarten because they know how important it is for each child to get the best start in life possible. They want to see every child have the chance to attend a high-quality, full-day pre-kindergarten program. In tough times, they think it just makes sense to invest in programs that demonstrate proven returns for all New Yorkers.

"As a nation, we cannot afford to lose our young children. Invest in them early, and that investment will pay off later on in countless ways," James says. "One of my grandchildren went to pre-kindergarten and one did not. I could see how it affected my grandson. There were so many things he wasn't prepared for that his sister could do because she got that early intervention."

For James and many others, it was the necessity that came with caring for grandchildren that inspired them to get involved. But she points out that you don't have to have had the same experience as her to advocate for



pre-k. She thinks the insight that comes with their decades of experience makes this a natural fit for many older adults who care about the well-being of all children.

"Seniors are the wisdom of our nation. They've been there. They've done that," James explains. "I feel I have a power to make a difference in somebody's life. That opportunity is so rewarding to me."

Linda James Program Coordinator Rochester, New York

Linda James began caring for two of her five grandchildren in 1987. The children are grown now, and James helps others by working at the Family Resource Centers of Crestwood Children's Center Skip Generation program, where she runs an educational and support group for grandparents raising grandchildren. In 2007, James was named the National Association of Social Workers New York Chapter- Genesee Valley Division's (NASW) Public Citizen of the Year. She has lived in Rochester for 21 years and grew up in Washington, D.C. Although she loves Rochester, she remains a diehard Redskins fan.

Janice Lubin Kirschner

Every day at schools in Westchester County, young children run to meet their senior reading buddies as part of the JCY-Westchester Community Partners Students and Mature Adults Read Together program. As executive director of JCY-WCP, Janice Lubin Kirschner believes older adults can do more than mentor kids. They can also speak up on their behalf as effective advocates.

"Seniors have a wealth of knowledge and experience that they can share. Older adults have the time and the energy. They have a very good perspective and they're not involved in the system themselves," says Kirschner.

She believes it is critical that children in New York benefit from high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.

"If we don't make pre-kindergarten available to every child, it will cost society more in the long run," Kirschner says. "The way to break the cycle of poverty is to have children be educated enough to where they can compete in the world comfortably and have enough self-esteem to be productive adults."

Kirschner points out that the difference in a family's income is often the deciding factor on whether or not a child is able to receive a quality early childhood experience. She says we need to invest in programs like pre-kindergarten and make them available to all kids. If you are concerned about high school dropout rates or criminal activity, then you should care about pre-k. Positive intervention before age five makes a lifetime of difference.

"There is a dramatic difference in preparation when a child comes in from an impoverished family as opposed to a more affluent family," Kirschner says. "It is difficult and expensive to play catch-up later. When they are unprepared for kindergarten, the educational lag just becomes greater and greater."

In addition to reading with children, seniors who volunteer at the JCY-WCP attend forums, Speak-Ups, write letters, and call their legislators to let them know the importance of pre-k for all New Yorkers. This involvement is



what keeps them passionate about kids and volunteering for the JCY-WCP year after year.

"We have very little turnover. We have some volunteers in their nineties who started when they were in their eighties. It's never too late to start making a difference in a child's life that benefits our whole community."

Janice Lubin Kirschner
Executive Director
JCY-Westchester Community Partners
Yonkers, New York

Janice Lubin Kirschner joined JCY-Westchester Community Partners in 1997 as the program director and became the executive director in 2006. The JCY-WCP is a leader in intergenerational volunteer programming that sponsors literacy programs and services to the 50+ population. She grew up in Yonkers, New York and has lived in Westchester County all her life. She and her husband have three children, two daughters-in-law and two beautiful grandchildren.

Judy Lear

With salt-and-pepper hair and the friendly warmth of a grandmother, Judy Lear might not be what most people think of when they hear the word “activist.” But the 66-year-old actively fights sexism, racism, and ageism from the front lines as the convener of the New York Gray Panther Network, volunteer chair of the Gray Panther National Board, and a member of its delegation to the United Nations.

An intergenerational group working for social and economic justice and peace, the Gray Panthers are “age and youth in action.” This multi-issue advocacy mission brought Lear to the battle to ensure that quality pre-k is available to New York’s children, particularly as the current economic crisis affects so many New York families. By maintaining investments in early education, New York legislators can address the immediate needs of children and produce long-term gains for the state.

“As responsible people, regardless of our age, we need to support what is happening for young people,” Lear says. “It makes such a difference in a child’s life if they have a pre-k experience. I’m talking as an educator, a grandparent, and from my own personal experiences as a Gray Panther.”

According to Lear, participating in New York Seniors4Kids is a great opportunity to advocate for children and build a strong future for New York. Seniors4Kids also provides a chance to challenge stereotypes about older adults and to highlight the many ways that people age 50 and older contribute to building the social fabric of their communities. “I am of the belief that older people are generous, are kind and see the greater good. This awful stereotypical image of seniors as ‘only watching out for themselves’ is something that we as an older generation need to dis-suade,” Lear explains. “One of the ways we can do that is by showing how much we support programs for younger people that allow them to develop to their full potential, benefitting all of us ultimately.”

She thinks it is a shame that every child in New York doesn’t have the chance to attend pre-k, because it



enriches the life of a child both educationally and socially. While the number of people attending college is growing, so is the number of teenagers dropping out of high school.

“Gray Panthers really understand the importance of a good childhood. And pre-school starts a child out in a very positive way,” Lear concludes. “What we invest in

today will come back to New York 1,000 times by having a well educated populace. It starts with that seed.”

Judy Lear National Board Chair, Gray Panthers New York City, New York

Judy Lear has been involved with the Gray Panthers for seven years. She was born and raised in Minnesota. Her BS degree was in Education from the University of Minnesota, and she became an elementary school physical education teacher. She lived there until she was almost 50, when she left to pursue a Masters Degree in Public Administration from the Kennedy School at Harvard University. She worked for the Girl Scouts and has traveled the world as part of her work with the International Council of Jewish Women. She moved to New York City after vowing to live there for at least one year of her life. Nearly nine years later, Lear still calls the city home. She has three adult children and four wonderful grandchildren.

Dennis Tracey

Dennis Tracey will be the first to tell you that most seniors in New York want lawmakers to help make the world a better place for all generations. He says that universal pre-kindergarten is a policy guaranteed to do just that.

"We're looking for the improvement of society as a whole, not just about retired people and seniors, but about the quality of life," Tracey says. "If you make an investment in youth, it will help society, and help individuals when they get to the age of retirement."

Many members of the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans (NYSARA) have grandchildren, and therefore have a personal stake in urging policymakers to make pre-k available to all kids in New York. Tracey also thinks that older adults make great advocates for kids because they are at a place in life where they can draw upon their experiences, asking tough questions such as, "What do we need as a culture to prove our worth, and where should we put our energies?" The answers to those questions lead most seniors to take action to help the next generation, he says.

Since he first began teaching in 1971, Tracey says Americans have grown to understand more about the ways kids learn and about how important it is to reach them early in life. He adds that the state needs to adopt ways, like pre-kindergarten, to give kids the best education possible.

"The world has changed, and the system has to also change," Tracey says. "We have to remodel our system and we have to realize that children start to learn from the time that they are born."

While pre-k focuses on early childhood development, Tracey has an intergenerational view of education. He says that when kids develop a love of learning early, they will become more productive workers and eventually become more productive seniors. According to Tracey, pre-kindergarten is nothing short of the perfect economic recovery plan.



"If you reflect upon what's wrong with our economy today and you want to fix it, you begin by directing energies to our most vital and vibrant resource — our children," he explains. "Even though there's a financial crunch, people have to understand that this is an investment that will pay off more than anything else for the society at large."

Dennis Tracey Executive Director, New York State Alliance for Retired Americans (NYSARA) Chester, New York

Sixty-year-old Dennis Tracey lives in Chester, New York and has served as the executive director of the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans (NYSARA) for the past two and a half years. Prior to holding that position, he spent 33 years as a secondary social studies teacher, became president of his union local, and served on the board of the New York State United Teachers Union.

Tracey has two grown daughters, who both attended pre-k programs.

What is Seniors4Kids?

Generations United's Seniors4Kids (www.seniors4kids.org) is a civic engagement initiative that demonstrates the important role older adults can play in support of issues that directly benefit children and youth. Currently, we help adults age 50+ create statewide networks of community leaders and grassroots volunteers who work to increase access to and improve the quality of pre-k programs. Seniors4Kids goals are to increase public and political awareness of the powerful role adults play in youth advocacy; present an effective model for older adult engagement on behalf of children's issue; and provide inspiration and technical assistance for state and local organizations to implement effective programs connecting older adults, children, and youth. Seniors4Kids is currently active in New York, New Jersey, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. The initiative started as a pilot program in Florida and operated previously in Ohio.



Photo credit: Pamela Giacoia

Ten Ways You Can Get Involved



BECOME a Captain4Kids and **LEARN** more about the state of pre-k in New York from Generations United's Seniors4Kids at www.seniors4kids.org or Winning Beginning NY at www.winningbeginningny.org.



ATTEND an upcoming Seniors4Kids events and **RAISE** your voice on behalf of children.



MONITOR your local newspaper for articles on early education and **WRITE** letters to the editor expressing older adult support.



FAX, EMAIL, or SEND a letter to your elected officials telling them why you support increasing the availability and quality of pre-k.



LOOK for intergenerational volunteer opportunities such as assisting in your local school or early education center, becoming a New York State Foster Grandparent, and many other activities that you can find in your local community either online or through your volunteer center.



VISIT with your local representatives at their local offices or in Albany.



HELP RECRUIT more Captains4Kids.



REACH out to older adult organizations and clubs to partner for key activities.



LEND your wisdom and skills by participating in advisory capacity as a **LEAD CAPTAIN**.



TELL your story and why you think pre-k matters.

Participating in Seniors4Kids won't take a lot of your time. By raising our voices together, Captains4Kids can make a big difference in the lives of New York's children.

About Generations United

Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations and individuals representing more than 70 million Americans. Since 1986, GU has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations, providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.

GU's Mission:

To improve the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all.

Vision:

A world that values and engages all generations.

Core Beliefs:

GU is the catalyst that brings single-age focused groups together to build and support a common agenda while providing a unique voice in public debate. GU honors, supports, and engages all ages. Further, we believe:

- Intergenerational collaboration will unite and improve our communities.
- Intergenerational approaches have a positive relationship to economic growth and value creation.
- Public policies should meet the needs of all generations.
- Resources are more wisely used when they connect the generations, rather than separate them.
- Discrimination in any form limits a person's potential to contribute to the development of his or her community.
- Grandparents and other adults who step forward to raise children are providing an economic service to families and the country.

Endnotes

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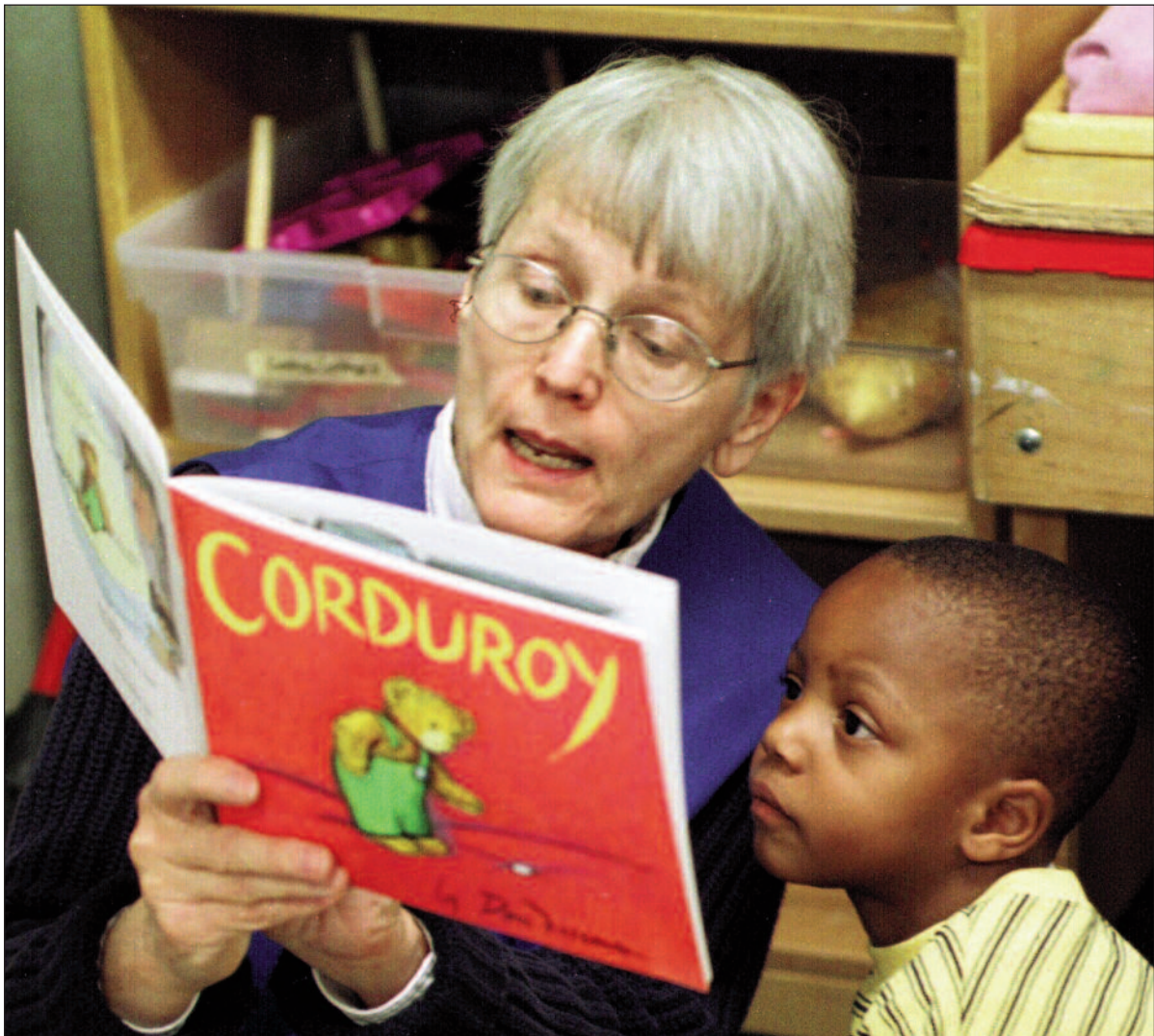
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