

# Reading is Fundamental *By Iya Green*

Since its beginning three years ago, the Academy of Learners After-School Program at 13th Avenue School, has had the privilege of participating in Reading is Fundamental book distributions. On April 27, 2012, we had our last book distribution for the 2011-2012 school year.

Students reported to the after-school office, by grade, to select books. Before they chose, they were asked about the importance of R.I.F distributions and how the distributions benefit students. Some of our students' responses were:

“R.I.F books give you the opportunity to expand your mind.”  
“I like to read my books after homework is done.”  
“Before R.I.F my home library was empty, now I have different books to read.”  
“When is the next R.I.F distribution?”

R.I.F. distributes books to the students three times a year. At each distribution, students choose two books for a yearly total of six books per student. Students use their books at home and in the after-school program. The books provide an opportunity for students to learn about topics in which they are interested.

We are truly thankful to have this program in our school and look forward to distributing books during the next, 2012-2013, school year.



## Two FOCUS Success Stories

When Luis Rodriguez began attending FOCUS' After-School Learning Program at 9 years old, he didn't imagine it would change his life. Louis, a supervisor at Home Depot Corporation says he still remembers the day his mother brought him to enroll in the after-school program. Because of that day, he says, “my life changed completely.”

Luis says, “I remember my FOCUS advisor, Mr. Raymon Cotto, very well. He has been an inspiration to reach my goals. I will never forget him. When I turned 13 years old, Mr. Cotto bought me a cake to celebrate my birthday. It's something I can't forget in my heart.”

Cotto, himself, had attended FOCUS



Luis Rodriguez



Raymon Cotto

programs as a troubled youth. FOCUS became his first place of employment as a young man and he later returned as a youth counselor. He says, “For 16 years, I helped juveniles accomplish their goals -- school grades, taking responsibility, respecting elders -- I helped with homework and crises. I was there to talk with them and

their families. I enjoyed teaching them right from wrong, and the kids related to me because I was in need of help when I was their age.”

Today, Rodriguez is a hard working, responsible, self-reliant, charitable person. In fact, he was instrumental in convincing the Home Depot Corporation to extend its volunteer program to participate in FOCUS' kitchen remodeling (see page 1). In addition, Rodriguez and his wife, Sharon, donated two televisions to FOCUS' Senior Center.

Cotto has worked with troubled youth for 27 years and continues to give 100 percent helping families to succeed.



**Piedad Vasquez**  
Program Director

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Hola!

Best wishes to you and your family. Welcome to another exciting season at FOCUS!

The FOCUS Hispanic Seniors Program celebrated the grand re-opening of the Hispanic Seniors Center and newly renovated kitchen on Wednesday, April 11, 2012. The kitchen project was made possible by a \$200,000 grant from the Essex County Division of Housing & Community Development. The grant allowed for necessary renovations and the installation of state-of-the-art cooking equipment.

The newly renovated kitchen has enabled FOCUS to increase the number of meals provided to seniors at the Center and to frail seniors who are unable to come to the Center. FOCUS is now delivering 250-300 Meals on Wheels and Congregate Nutrition Program meals to seniors on a daily basis.

Grants from the City of Newark, Department of Economic & Housing Development and over 50 volunteers from five Home Depot stores completed the renovation project and other vital work throughout FOCUS' facilities.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was attended by the Hon. Cory Booker, Mayor



of the City of Newark and Essex County Executive Mr. Joseph DiVincenzo, represented by State Senator Maria Teresa Ruiz. Members of the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Newark City Council, representatives from the Essex County Division of Senior Services, staff members from the City of Newark Department of Economic & Housing Development, Home Depot representatives, members of the FOCUS Board of Trustees, participating seniors, their relatives, and members of the community-at-large also attended.

FOCUS Board of Trustees and the seniors participating in the program expressed their appreciation to all for their significant contributions in supporting the renewal of the FOCUS Hispanic Seniors Program.

Muchos saludos,  
Piedad Vasquez, Program Director

However, despite advances, women continue to be underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics – STEM.

According to Girl Scout research, more than 70 percent of girls are interested in these fields. Further research finds that African American and hispanic girls, though interested, receive less

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exposure, less support, and lower academic achievement in the STEM fields.

Based on these statistics, Growing STEM for Girls held a Garden State kick-off to bring together organizations to address the issue. The kick-off took place on April 18, 2012, at the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, NJSACC.

Guest speakers included Diana Genco, Director of NJSAAC; Mary

*(continued pg. 2)*

### Growing STEM for Girls in the Garden State Kick-Off Event



By Daniella Sofianakos

Over the past 50 years, women in the United States have made great strides in education and entry into the workforce.



**FOCUS** Family Success Center recently began facilitating 5210 Do You Know? The campaign is based on the 5-2-1-0 prevention message developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics: eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day; limit screen time to 2 hours or fewer per day; get 1 hour or more of physical activity every day; drink 0 sugar-sweetened drinks. This national campaign is a major aspect of First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" initiative to address childhood obesity.

Family Success Centers in the greater Newark area will reach out to families of children 0 to 5 years of age encouraging them to attend the program's four workshops providing information about nutrition and healthy-lifestyle options.

While parents attend the workshops, children will be invited to participate in fun activities. Each workshop will include a family meal sponsored by the Community Food Bank of NJ.

## Pablo Armijo, A Success Story

By Ana Chavarria

Pablo Armijo is originally from Ecuador and has lived in the United States for several years. He enrolled in **FOCUS'** English as a Second Language (ESL) program to improve his language skills. He practiced English outside of the classroom as well, reading newspaper articles and watching television programs to build comprehension and listening skills. As a result of his hard work and dedication, Pablo made remarkable progress and built self confidence. He advanced to **FOCUS'** intermediate-level class, which focuses on building conversational skills.



Pablo has now completed the ESL program and will attend classes at Essex County College.

### STEM continued from pg 1

Reese, Ph.D., Director of the Office of Student Support Services, NJ Department of Education; Mike MacEwan, Director of 21st CCLC and STEM initiatives NJSAAC; Suzanne Trauth, Playwright for iDream; and Clare Drobot, Producing Associate.

The event included several rounds of speed networking, panel discussions and breakout discussions to help organizations begin collaboration efforts to address growth for girls in the STEM fields.

To join the team or to gather further information, access the National Girls Collaborative Project at:

[www.ngcproject.org](http://www.ngcproject.org).

## Global Youth-Service Day

By Iya Green

On April 20, 2012, Thirteenth Avenue **FOCUS** Academy of Learners After-School Program participated in Global Youth Service Day, an annual campaign that celebrates and mobilizes the millions of children and youth who improve their communities each day of the year through service and service learning. Established in 1988, Global Youth Service Day is the largest and longest running service event in the world and the only day of service dedicated to children and youth. Over 100 countries take part in the celebration.

For this year's celebration, 13th Avenue After-School students decided to promote a healthy way of life.



Students set up three stations with healthy snacks and nutritional information. Parents and students were invited to each station to receive a prepared snack from one student, while a second student shared the importance of healthy eating. A fourth station was dedicated to physical activity. Parents and students were invited to participate in jumping jacks, jumping rope and hula hoops.

Global Youth Service Day was a great success. Student bloggers Saladine Amos, Michael Franco and Tyrec Franklin took quotes from participants at the event. This is what they had to say:

"The snacks are healthy, delicious and distribute energy."

"I'm very excited about eating healthy."

"The smoothie is delicious and nutritious at the same time."

"Today I learned new tips on being physically fit."

"This is a great way to get kids to be healthy."

"I had so much fun; can we do this again?"

## March into Literacy

By Dorine Francis

March is National March into Literacy Month. In celebration of this event, the 21CCLC Academy of Learners After-School Program at Sussex Avenue School of Art & Science hosted a book fair on Tuesday March 6, 2012. Thanks to the collaboration of NJ After 3 and Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), students in grades 4 through 8 each received three free Scholastic books.

The After-School program aligns with the school day by reinforcing

literacy -- a key component to a student's ability to do well in school. **FOCUS** After-School also strives to demonstrate the fun and excitement that reading has to offer.

At the book fair, students lined up with excitement to view the wide array of books and identify their selections. Parents and students were grateful to participate in this wonderful activity.



## Potluck Fundraiser at Sussex Avenue School

By Dorine Francis

On Thursday December 22, 2011, the **FOCUS** Academy of Learners After-School Program at Sussex Avenue School of Art & Science proudly hosted its first Potluck Fundraiser Dinner. The event served as a holiday activity for students, parents, and the greater-school community as well as a fundraiser for an end-of-year field trip. It was an opportunity for everyone to come together and feast while giving thanks for all of the wonderful people who surround us.



Students and staff members brought in a favorite or popular dish of food, beverage, or condiment.

The dinner was greatly anticipated as the line wrapped outside of the cafeteria door. Students and parents purchased dinner plates for \$2.00, with all proceeds going toward the end-of-school-year field trip. Everyone's participation made the dinner a success.



### FSC Hosts Screenings

**FOCUS** Family Success Center hosted free mammogram and cervical cancer screenings to all eligible women in the community on April 25, 2012. The screenings were sponsored by UMDNJ's S.A.V.E Women Program. The goal of the S.A.V.E program is to reduce the number of cancer-related health disparities among women who are either uninsured and or have limited insurance coverage.

The event began with a brief educational session followed by intake preparations for the examinations. Screenings took place in the Mammography Motion Van.

The American Cancer Society recommends that women age 40 and above have a mammogram and cervical cancer screening via a Pap smear test at least once a year. **FOCUS** Family Success Center's goal is to continue to work with community partners to provide support, education, screenings and follow-up services to the families of our communities and to continue efforts to strive to SAVE lives!

### 15-Minute Child Break



On Saturday, February 11, 2012, the **FOCUS** Family Success Center offered its families and staff members Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey's presentation, *The 15-Minute Child Break*. The presentation provides resources and information to help families prevent substance abuse in their homes.

The program's name comes from the message: "Parents who talk to their children about their activities an average of 15 minutes per day have children who are 67 percent less likely to try marijuana."

The program's presenter, Jamielee Smith, is a licensed counselor who has been working in the field of addictions counseling for over ten years. Her interactive presentation gave participants great age-specific information and communication advice related to substance abuse.