

Manhattan Youth Group Reaches Food Drive Milestone

By: Rebecca Spitz



A Washington Heights youth organization is gearing up to give out over 100 cans of food at its annual Thanksgiving food drive. NY1's Rebecca Spitz filed the following report.

Cheers greeted the hundredth can collected at one food collection spot in Washington Heights. Kids who live in the neighborhood stood in front of four supermarkets and accepted cans for an annual Thanksgiving food drive.

"I feel happy. Helping the ones in need, I'll be happy myself," said 11-year-old Joseph Bryant.

"I like to help people, and so we give them cans and food to help them out," said 10-year-old Janet Pichardo.

All of the kids are members of Fresh Youth Initiatives, a community-based youth development organization that's open to any Washington Heights resident between 10 and 17.

"We're getting them at the stage of development where literally they're thinking about what kind of a person they want to be. And if we get them at this age and this becomes a part of who they are, it really helps them with developing successful character," said Steve Ramos, FYI's executive director.

The Thanksgiving food drive is just one of the volunteer programs FYI sponsors. Its events are tailored to the season and the neighborhood's needs.

"They make mittens and pillows from scratch. We go out and give them to our local community areas. We also make soup, PB&J—which is peanut butter and jelly sandwiches—and our kids go to men's shelters in different areas to give them out to people who really need them," said Jeremiah Roman, FYI program director.

Eighty percent of FYI's funding is private. The rest comes from city, state and federal government grants.

FYI describes its work as a cascading model of leadership, one where kids who've spent years in the program can serve as mentors to the group's newest members."

"Seeing my brother and sister come to the program when they were younger really inspired me. I would want to make a difference like they do every day," said 17-year-old Moises Torres.

That commitment is already rubbing off on the group's newer members, who are very pleased with the food drive's results.

"It's good because we have 103 cans and we got like \$200," said 10-year-old Messiah Buchanan. Everything collected will be given out at FYI's food pantry next week.