

# lenox hill neighborhood house early childhood center

New York, NY

## Overview

The Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Early Childhood Center, in New York City, provides year-round comprehensive preschool to children ages 3 to 6. It provides a rich educational curriculum for 150 children from all five boroughs and of dozens of ethnicities, almost all of them from low-income families. The center prepares children for success in kindergarten and later grades by working on language, literacy, motor, socialization, and other cognitive skills. Enrichment activities such as computer use, art, music, and swimming are a regular part of the curriculum.

The center is located in and operated by the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, one of the oldest and largest social service agencies on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Founded in 1894, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House is a multi-site, multi-service agency whose other programs include after-school programs, teen activities, senior services, family recreation activities, community organizing, voter registration, English for speakers of other languages, vocational education, welfare-to-work services, and services for the homeless. Families with children in the preschool have access to myriad resources at the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, including a fitness center and pool, housing, public assistance, and welfare-to-work services.

## Profile

### Staffing

#### Education

- Teachers: 25

#### Family Services

- Family assistant
- Family services manager
- Family workers: 3
- Transition coordinator

Total: 31

### Children & Families Served

- Day care: 72
- Head Start: 80
- Universal Pre-Kindergarten: 60

Total: 150 (some children are enrolled in multiple programs)

### Budget

\$1.5 million  
(blended funding model)

\$10,000 per child

## How the Program Builds Protective Factors

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Early Childhood Center builds five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

### Parental Resilience

- Parent Education
- Support and Parenting Groups
- Volunteer and Leadership Opportunities

### Social Connections

- Cultural Events and Family Activities
- Support and Parenting Groups

### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Mental Health Consultation
- Volunteer and Leadership Opportunities

### Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Community Partnerships
- Enrollment
- Family Services
- Health Services
- Home Visits
- Outreach to At-Risk Families

### Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Emotionally Responsive Classroom
- Enrollment
- Mental Health Consultation
- Transition Support

### Services Provided On-Site

- Home visits
- Mental health therapy
- Parent-child activities
- Parent education
- Preschool
- Support groups

### Partners

- Child Advocacy Center
- Elementary school principals
- HIP Child Plus (Medicaid and CHIP)
- Hospital for Special Surgery (screening)
- Hunter School for Communications (hearing screening)
- Lenox Hill Neighborhood House
- New York Dental University (screening, workshops)
- New York Hospital (immunizations)
- Ronald McDonald House
- School of the Visual Arts (art therapy, workshops)
- Settlement houses

### Ways of Identifying When Families Are at Risk

- Every day at 10 am, an attendance review is performed. If a child has missed multiple days, a family worker calls and / or visits the family.
- Observation of parent-child behavior at pick-up and drop-off
- Harsh or punitive parental response to child
- Child in need of grooming or care

## Key Program Features

### Community Partnerships

Strong community partnerships are essential to the center's support for families. Staff not only to connect families to needed services and support but also empower them to be active community members. Community partnership activities include:

- Developing *Community Partnership Plans*
- Maintaining a thorough, updated list of community resources and services
- Referring families to services and following up on all referrals to monitor quality and participation
- Advocating for families with other service providers, both with individual families and systemically through the Advocacy Committee
- Hosting speakers, trainers, and consultants from community agencies

### Cultural Events and Family Activities

The center hosts events regularly to bring families together in an informal way. Each season, a large social event is held (these include a May Day event, harvest festival, and winter festival). These augment free intergenerational art classes, regular parent coffees, and other activities. Events are inclusive of the many cultures and ethnicities of participating families. For example, the winter festival takes the place of a Christmas party. On Thanksgiving, the center hosts an international luncheon at which parents from all backgrounds share their food and cultural traditions. Childcare and food are provided at all events to create a stress-free experience for parents.

### Emotionally Responsive Classroom

This staff training program, which was created by Leslie Kaplow of Bank Street College, helps teachers create outlets for children's emotional expression, which the center views as an important part of

- Behavior change in child, including increased aggression
- Apparent psychological changes in parent

### Response Protocol

If a staff member is concerned about a family:

- The subject is raised at a monthly team meeting with teaching staff, family workers, and community partners.
- Family workers reach out to the family at pick-up, at drop-off, or by phone or home visit.
- A conference with the parents may be held.
- The family is referred to community partners as needed; family workers follow up.
- The mental health consultant may provide support.

If a staff member suspects child abuse or neglect, staff follow the program's manual on reporting procedures:

- Staff member informs supervisor immediately
- Supervisor meets with staff person, consulting psychologist, and others working closely with family
- If a report is needed, whenever possible, parents are notified
- Staff support family through the reporting and follow-up process and connect them to needed assistance

development. Arts, dramatic play, and other opportunities for emotional expression are all integrated into the classroom experience. Special attention is placed on emotional transitions such as entering into a new class or leaving an old one, and children are given structured opportunities to express their emotions during these transitions. The same attention is given to emotional transitions in children's home lives. Teachers also develop appropriate types of emotional availability to students and the ability to send clear emotional messages.

## Enrollment

During enrollment, family workers develop plans with each family:

- The Community Partnership Plan connects families with community services and resources.
- The Parent Partnership Plan engages parents in the center and in at-home activities that promote children's growth and development.
- The Special Needs Plan helps parents understand their rights and responsibilities related to special education services and how to evaluate these services.

The Family Services Department is an integrated part of the center and is responsible for the parenting and family support aspects of all programs. It is staffed by a manager with an MSW, a transition coordinator (enrolled in an MSW program) who helps families move from early childhood services to the school system, and three family workers who specialize in parent partnerships, special needs, health services, and community partnerships. Family workers have bachelor's degrees or extensive experience working with families. Two have the Family Development Credential developed by Cornell University.

At enrollment, these staff work with families to ensure that the center has all the information needed to fully support them. They also coordinate family support activities, work with families, serve as advocates, and connect families to outside services and systems.

## Staff Resources

Through a partnership with the Child Advocacy Center, staff receive regular training on child abuse and neglect.

When staff are concerned about a family, they can get support and information from:

- Licensed parent educators who make home visits
- On-site family advocate
- Licensed therapists
- Other organizations that are partners

## What People Say

"We try to build a sense of openness and trust and use non-hierarchical decision making. Everyone is trusted to make judgments. When there are disagreements, there is much discussion about why a certain course is taken."

—Staff member

## Health Services

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Early Childhood Center partners with healthcare providers to ensure that families have access to medical screenings, immunizations, dental screenings, and Medicaid. Health education for parents and children is also available. These services are provided through a 13-member health advisory committee that includes providers (such as New York Presbyterian Hospital's chief of pediatric emergency medicine), staff, and parents. The committee is coordinated by the center's family worker / health coordinator.

## Home Visits

A team that includes the child's teacher and a family service worker or coordinator makes two home visits to the family each school year. A visit before the school year starts helps staff build the relationship with the family and increase child and parent comfort. During the second visit, later in the year, the teacher interacts with the child while the family service worker assesses the needs and strengths of the family.

In addition, family workers conduct home visits throughout the year, as often as once a week, depending on the needs of the family.

## Mental Health Consultation

A mental health therapist spends 8 to 10 hours per week at the center. The therapist has worked with the staff and parents for 25 years and is an integrated part of the center. Mental health services, including group and individual sessions, are available to families every Monday and Friday. The therapist also provides guidance to staff, during monthly meetings, on how best to work with and support families. Finally, the therapist promotes healthy relationships and communication among staff.

## Outreach to At-Risk Families

Families participating in Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Early Childhood Center must meet one or more of the following criteria.

- Child is at risk of abuse or neglect
- Family is receiving public assistance, Medicaid, food stamps, or WIC
- Child is in foster care or shelter
- Child has or is likely to have special needs (10% of overall enrollment)
- Other family member has special needs
- Family is stressed due to illness, substance addiction, or being emotionally overwhelmed
- Household has only one parent

In order to locate these families, the center conducts outreach and recruitment through other programs of Lenox Hill Neighborhood House and community partners such as Ronald McDonald House.

## Parent Education

The center helps parents get information on specific issues and engage in regular support opportunities, which include:

- Weekly Parenting in the New Millennium support and training groups led by professional consultants and staff
- Workshops on topics such as parenting skills, health, sex education, domestic violence, and learning disabilities
- A 20-session Exploring Parenting class, in partnership with the School of the Visual Arts, that uses art therapy techniques (in English and Spanish)
- A 12-session Developing Skills in the Classroom course that teaches parents about child development and prepares them to teach this material
- A biweekly fathers' group
- A biweekly single parent support group
- A weekly parent support group

## Staff Training and Development

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Early Childhood Center has a strong training component. Each staff member has a tailored individual development plan that is developed during his or her annual evaluation. Staff receive on-site training as well as incentives and tuition reimbursement that allow them to take part in formal training.

## Transition Plans

When a child is enrolled at the center, there is a concerted effort to make the transition easy, starting with a home visit before the school year starts. Then, the parent spends three half-days at the center while his or her child is engaged in the program, to help both parent and child make the transition. Parents also come to understand that the center is a place for them as well as their children and get to know staff and other parents.

A year-long process eases the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Meetings held twice each month help parents learn about testing, applying to public and private schools, variances, school zones, and other pertinent issues. The transition coordinator is available to support and counsel families through the process.

## Volunteer and Leadership Opportunities

Parents volunteer at the center consistently. They often read aloud to children, chaperone children on trips, clean classrooms, and help with art projects. Parents may also take a substitute assistant-teacher class, which provides them with training in child development and leadership skills needed in the classroom, and the *Developing Skills in the Classroom* course. Parents sit on numerous committees and sub-committees that make decisions about the center.