



SUPPORT TODAY. SUCCESS TOMORROW.

# Here & Now

A Newsletter from Leake & Watts



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## Moving Forward



Karina is learning how to sew up an injury by stitching up a pig's foot in class. Hands-on training is a central component of her coursework at Stanford Brown College, where she is studying to be a Medical Assistant. "I really like my classes," says Karina, age 20. "We don't just sit – we get to do." Like many college students, Karina is focused on building her career and achieving economic independence. But Karina is also very much focused on her family. Each afternoon when Karina finishes school, she picks up her daughters, four-year-old Kayla and two-year-old Kayliana, at day care. The evenings with the girls coloring and having dinner are an important part of the day for all three of them.



Karina and her daughter Kayla.

Karina is one of several young women who recently transitioned to living on her own in the community from the Leake & Watts Mother & Child Program, which provides a nurturing home and support for teen mothers in foster care and their children. Teen motherhood is a challenge under any circumstances. For teens in foster care, the obstacles can seem insurmountable. Many teenage mothers struggle to complete high school, have high rates of unemployment and are often dependent on public assistance for many years. Yet like Karina, many other young women from the Leake & Watts Program are learning how to support their children as they complete high school or earn a GED, enroll in college, and begin moving forward to a much brighter future.

India, age 21, like Karina, is taking what she has learned about parenting, household tasks and budgeting at the Mother & Child Program and stepping out into the world. India was seven months pregnant when she came to Leake & Watts, and the wide variety of supports that we provide have made it possible for her to build a life that defies all her previous expectations. With a history of living in several different residential treatment centers and foster homes for years, India was confused, angry and lacking the self-confidence that she needed to be a good parent. "At first, I was really nervous and scared because I thought

# LEAKE & WATTS

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## Executive Director's Message

Dear Friends,

Along with celebrations, the holidays are a time to reflect on what is important to us and give thanks for all that we have. I, for one, am grateful for our tremendous community of supporters and dedicated staff that helps us to change lives here at Leake & Watts each and every day.

As we have shared in previous newsletters, with so many of our programs expanding, it is busy and exciting here at Leake & Watts. The days continue to be full of activity and speed past as we approach the end of the year. Our Juvenile Justice Non-Secure Placement Program is about to move from our Yonkers campus to its permanent home in the Bronx, and we are only a few weeks away from the groundbreaking for another new community residence for adults with Developmental Disabilities. We also are looking to renovate properties and hire staff for our newest Juvenile Justice initiative, our Limited-Secure Placement Programs, which are slated to open in the spring of 2014.

In October, we were thrilled that our Annual Awards Gala set a new fundraising event record, raising nearly \$540,000 to support thousands of children and families. Thank you to our generous supporters that helped us to raise over \$125,000 more than we have been able to raise in past years. We appreciate everyone who made our Gala a success. In this issue of Here & Now, learn about upcoming opportunities to get involved, particularly with our Holiday Toy Drive. Last year, thanks to the help of individuals and 30 companies and organizations, Leake & Watts distributed over 2,000 toys and gift cards to children and teens. We would love to have you join the Toy Drive this year – we are always happy to welcome new partners and share the joy of the season.

When I visit each of our schools, group homes, child care centers and other programs, I am reminded of our agency's wide reach in the community. I am inspired by the positive impact that our staff, volunteers and generous supporters have on the lives of so many of our neighbors. It is truly a privilege to be a part of such a vibrant, caring community.

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday season,



Alan

## Leake & Watts Hosts Record-Breaking Gala



The crowded ballroom at the Pierre Hotel was humming with excitement as over 200 guests witnessed an outpouring of support this October 23rd. Thanks to an inspiring show of generosity, our friends and supporters made our 2013 Annual Awards Gala the organization's most successful gala to date, raising nearly \$540,000 to help support children and families across Leake & Watts. This year's Gala honored Lynn Blodgett, President of Xerox Services and Executive Vice President of Xerox Corporation. Mr. Blodgett has done significant philanthropic work, raising funds to fight homelessness using the publicity and proceeds of his award winning book of photography ***Finding Grace: The Face of America's Homeless***. Mr. Blodgett inspired guests as he shared his desire to portray the humanity and dignity of the homeless through his photography. Then, building on their exciting success at our 2012 Gala, legendary Hockey Hall of Fame New York Ranger Rod Gilbert and WABC-TV Senior Meteorologist Bill Evans enthused the crowd with their banter, bringing in a record-breaking \$113,000 to support Leake & Watts during an animated live auction.

While the funds raised through the auction will support many vital programs at Leake & Watts, many families and staff were excited that a sizeable amount of the money raised will be used to purchase iPads for our Early Childhood Programs. These iPads will help to transform classroom and family communication for our preschoolers on the autism spectrum. Rosalyn McClain, a parent who has acted as a spokesperson for children on the autism spectrum at several of our events, spoke at the Gala. Rosalyn has seen how an iPad can promote a child's success firsthand with her daughter Leilani, who is on the autism spectrum. After sharing her story, Rosalyn reached out to guests to help support the purchase of iPads and other vital resources for our Early Childhood Programs. Thanks to the funds raised at our record-breaking 2013 Gala, we will be able to purchase iPads for many classrooms in our five Early Childhood Programs and much more.

"Leake & Watts is indebted to our generous friends who continually offer their support at our Annual Awards Gala," said Matthew Mayer, Leake & Watts Board Member and Gala Chair. "This year, in realizing our most successful gala to date, we were thrilled to have brought new friends to join existing friends in our caring community. Our staff works tirelessly so that children, adults and families supported by our programs can achieve a whole new level of independence and success. Our goals could not be met without the support of such a giving community."

*Leake & Watts 2013 Annual Awards Gala honoree Lynn Blodgett with his editor Laurie Kratochvil and Leake & Watts Board Member Agnes Hassell (top). Parent Advocate and Gala Speaker Rosalyn McClain with Christine Kelly, Director of the Leake & Watts Children's Learning Center (middle). Guest Karen Peetz enjoys the live auction at the 2013 Leake & Watts Gala (bottom).*

WITH THE NEW YEAR JUST  
AROUND THE CORNER, KEEP  
AN EYE OUT FOR INFORMATION  
ABOUT OUR EXCITING  
UPCOMING **SPRING EVENTS!**

Do you want to make sure that you receive all the latest updates on what's going on at Leake & Watts? Visit our website at <http://www.leakeandwatts.org> and sign up for our email newsletter. You'll receive all the latest information about events, celebrations, graduations and other activities across our programs.



## Youth Give Back



“When I went to help serve food at the soup kitchen for the first time, I was scared,” confesses Aleyda, a nineteen year-old student involved with our Teen Community Service Program, which provides opportunities for youth at our Residential Treatment Center to volunteer with local community organizations. “But I wanted to see how it felt to help other people. I’m proud of myself. I was serving chicken and a lot of people were thanking me, which made me feel really good.”

Aleyda is one of several teenagers from the Leake & Watts Residential Treatment Center dedicated to the Community Service Program. Through partnerships with several different community organizations, the teens are able to participate in a wide range of activities when they volunteer. They sort baby clothing and toys for low-income families, and help lead both educational projects and arts and crafts activities for younger children. They also visit churches in the Bronx and Manhattan, helping to serve food at soup kitchens for individuals with HIV and AIDS, and packing “Pantry Bags” with non-perishables and fresh produce.

Kamel Lyons, the Residential Treatment Center Recreation Supervisor, has been excited to see more and more residents joining the program. “The teens have become very interested in giving back to their community, which is a sign that they are really learning the values of responsibility

and achievement that we are teaching them. Our residents face a lot of challenges such as Attention Deficit Disorder and other learning disabilities, and volunteering also helps them gain focus and keeps them engaged for several hours, so there are a lot of benefits to this program even beyond community service.”

As the teens become more dedicated, they begin to understand these benefits as well. While Aleyda is proud of herself, Carlos most enjoys being able to help lead arts and crafts projects for young children. “I’m an artist, so I like helping the younger kids with their art skills. I tell them that they need to come up with their own thing – I encourage them to be creative. I feel really good that the kids look up to me and I love when they tell me that I’m like a big brother.”

“Our goal is always to empower the teens,” says Mr. Lyons. “It’s great to see that both Aleyda and Carlos have gained confidence from their volunteer experiences. A lot of our residents have been through traumatic situations, and some of them have even faced similar challenges to many of the people that we are helping when we volunteer. Through volunteerism, we can help our students to understand that they really can meet their own challenges and play a role in changing their community, too.”

A large focus of our Teen Community Service Program is also on service learning,

ensuring that the youth understand why they are volunteering. For each project, the program hosts a workshop and gives youth the opportunity to discuss relevant social issues such as food insecurity, nutrition, the challenges of raising a child for a low-income family, HIV and AIDS. “We discuss topics that will help our residents understand why we’re going to help a particular community or group of people,” explains Mr. Lyons. “Most of all, we try to eliminate any misconceptions or stigmas that may be associated with a social issue so that the teens are comfortable getting involved and really start to understand the way the world works. That is when they start to really gain confidence.”

Clear from the teens’ growing enthusiasm for the Community Service Program, service learning is having a powerful impact on the youth at the Residential Treatment Center. “When we help at the soup kitchen, I like talking to people to learn about their sons and daughters, their nieces and nephews,” says Carlos. “They’re always thanking us and asking us to come back, which feels great.” Aleyda says that she has learned a lot from talking with different people at the soup kitchens. “I had a lot of questions about people with HIV and AIDS before I started volunteering, but talking to people while I serve the food has really changed my perspective. They are really cool people and I am going to keep volunteering every chance I get.”

## Thanks to Our Employee Giving Campaign Donors!

Thank you to all of our employees that have joined our Employee Giving Campaign in 2013! In our second year of this initiative, the number of our staff members who are personally making a financial contribution to our programs increased by over 50%. **We are truly inspired by the generosity of our employees, who have pledged over \$53,000 to benefit the children, adults and families that we serve!**

The Employee Giving Fund enables us to go above and beyond the limits of traditional funding sources, not only by increasing our pool of donors but by inspiring non-employees to support Leake & Watts’ work. A portion of employee-donated funds are distributed as direct aid to individuals and families supported by the agency. Using these funds, we have helped the family of a residential student recover from a fire in their home, brought relief from the heat with the purchase of an

air conditioner for a young man with cognitive disabilities as well as his caregiver, helped a young couple furnish their new apartment as they work to keep their family together and provide for their child, and aided many families in purchasing groceries at the end of the month when food stamps have run out. Thank you to all of our employees who continue to give financially in addition to their daily work supporting individuals and families!

## Healthy Habits Begin Early



Exercise and nutrition are hot topics at the Dr. Katharine Dodge Brownell Preschool these days!

Thanks to a generous grant from the Lowenstein Foundation in partnership with the New York State Early Care & Learning Council, we launched our Early Childhood Healthy Futures Program at the Brownell Preschool this past spring. The program introduces children to new fresh fruits and vegetables during “Healthy Snack Time,” provides opportunities for our preschoolers to enjoy more fun physical fitness activities

such as dance and yoga on a daily basis, and incorporates more outdoor play time into every class’s routine.

But the most exciting part of the program – for both students and staff – has been the new Rooftop Children’s Garden. Now students have the opportunity to grow tomatoes, herbs, and even small fruit trees in raised garden beds and large planters on the roof of the Brownell Preschool. The kids have had a ton of fun learning about how to plant and water seeds, use a hoe and a

water hose, and pick their fresh produce, all so that they can grow their very own healthy snacks! After spending so much time working in the garden and talking about how fruits and vegetables help their bodies, some of the kids have even started to turn their noses up at cookies and cake. At a recent classroom birthday celebration, Emily shook her head when offered a scoop of ice cream, and asked her teacher, “Where’s my healthy snack?”







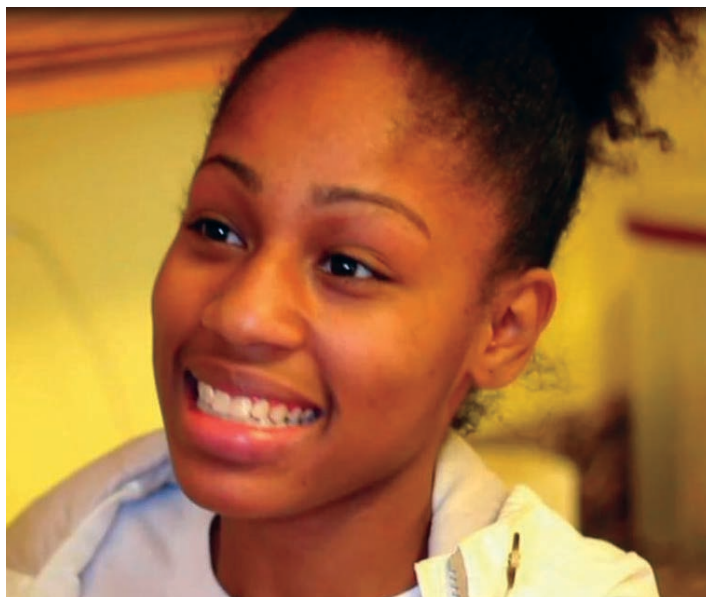
maybe I wouldn't be a good mom," she explains. "But the staff at Leake & Watts taught me everything I needed to know to take care of my son Desmond."

Not only did India learn how to feed, bathe and physically care for Desmond, but also gained a wider variety of parenting skills and knowledge. The teen mothers in the program learn how to use "time outs" and other disciplinary tools, the importance of providing children with a consistent routine, and ways to nurture their child's development. Through individual counseling and group sessions, the young women have the opportunity to address their own emotional challenges, gain confidence in their parenting skills and improve their self-esteem. India feels much more capable and knows how important the time that she spends with Desmond, now 22 months, is in order to nurture their relationship. She carefully helps him create stacks of blocks, then encourages him with a "Great job, Desi!" as he triumphantly stacks one on top that is as high as his head. Then, Desmond gleefully knocks over the whole stack of blocks, bouncing up and down, and India laughs out loud. "The staff never gave up on me," says India. "They always believed that I could be a good mom to Desmond. They believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, and I'm so grateful for that."

Significantly, India and Karina also learned many of the life skills that now enable them to successfully live on their own and succeed in school, such as money management, computer literacy, and proper nutrition. "I'm surprised by what I can manage on my own now," says Karina. "I didn't think I'd be able to go to school, take care of two kids and cook for myself all the time. When I think about all that, I realize how important everything has been that I learned at the Mother & Child Program."

Karina and India are now both capable mothers and successful students, and with the education that they are receiving, they will be equipped to provide and care for their children on their own long-term. While Karina is studying for a career in the medical field, India has completed her GED and is attending Borough of Manhattan Community College. She wants to be a social worker so that she can help other people who have faced challenges similar to her own.

Important to their success, India and Karina have remained connected to Leake & Watts after moving out of the program. As they make the transition to living on their own, a Leake & Watts Social Worker regularly visits them to see how they are managing daily tasks and the stress of parenting. Social Workers make sure that their homes remain clean and safe for their children, and that they are connected to community services such as health clinics and child care centers. Both are also enrolled in the Leake & Watts Parent-Child Home Program, a school readiness program for toddlers and their parents which provides them with weekly home visits for two years. "Everyone on our staff is so proud of Karina, India and the other girls who have recently transitioned out of the program," says Susan Sampogna, Leake & Watts Assistant Executive Director of Residential Services. "We can see that



*India is now able to balance being a mother to Desmond with attending college.*

they understand their children's needs and have learned so much about nurturing their strengths. It's so exciting to see them grow into motherhood." Kaisy Marcelo, the Mother & Child Residence Manager, proudly agrees: "India never thought that she would be able to manage college and the family life, but she is a fantastic mom and a great success story."

"I am raising my kids differently than how I grew up, and that's important to me," says Karina. "When I was young, there was screaming and yelling all the time. There was no pat on the back for a good job. But I've learned to be different in the way that I interact with my daughters. The Mother & Child Program taught me how to balance my life, to take time out for myself so I can calm down and don't yell at my kids. Really, they made me a better person and that means that my daughters will have a better life too."

## Mayor Mike Spano Honors Youth Gardeners



Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano, City Council President Chuck Lesnick, and City Councilmembers Wilson Terrero and Michael Sabatino joined in to celebrate this year's fall harvest at the Leake & Watts Yonkers Youth Garden. Mayor Spano presented awards to the Youth Gardeners who are residents at the Leake & Watts Residential Treatment Center, recognizing their efforts throughout the spring and summer that have made this year's harvest such a tremendous success. In partnership with the Food Bank for Westchester, the food grown by our Youth Gardeners is distributed to thousands of children and families in need throughout Westchester County. For the past two years, our Youth Gardens have provided approximately 8,000-10,000 1-cup servings of food for nearly 1,500 food insecure families across the county. This year, our Youth Gardeners increased their efforts, and our gardens yielded an impressive 3,919 pounds of produce. That translates into 14,612 servings of food for well over 2,000 families! Once the official ceremony was over, the Youth Gardeners had the opportunity to give the Mayor and the Councilmen a tour of our garden and assist our notable guests in harvesting some of our late fall crops.



"It is exciting to see our students take ownership of the garden and witness the pride that they feel as they see the literal fruits of their efforts when they harvest all the watermelons, tomatoes and other vegetables from the garden," says Alan Mucatel, Executive Director. "Most of the kids we serve are all too accustomed to being on the receiving end of community service. It is an extremely empowering and important experience for them to be able to give back and make such a positive impact on their local community."

## Tribute Gifts

If you would like to commemorate a special occasion or honor someone who has passed, we invite you to make an "In Honor of" or "In Memory of" gift. Your donation will support Leake & Watts' programs while you pay tribute to someone who is important to you. Whomever you designate will receive a thoughtful card from us, letting them know that a gift has been made in their name. To do so, contact us at 914.375.8605 or [development@leakeandwatts.org](mailto:development@leakeandwatts.org) or visit us at [www.leakeandwatts.org/make-a-donation](http://www.leakeandwatts.org/make-a-donation).

### IN HONOR OF GIFTS

**For:** Mothers at 234th Street Residence

**By:** Kaisy Marcelo

**For:** Biondi School Employees

**By:** Patti Gilhooley

**For:** Matthew Landsburgh

**By:** Alan Mucatel

### IN MEMORY OF GIFTS

**For:** James Douglas Richards

**By:** Meredith Barber

**For:** Michael Silfen

**By:** Michelle Block

**For:** Lilia Rodriguez

**By:** Omyra Cherrez

**For:** James Douglas Richards

**By:** Pierre-Michel R. Duverger

**For:** James Douglas Richards

**By:** Fabrizio Aguirre

**For:** James Douglas Richards

**By:** Patti Gilhooley

**For:** Daveon McPherson

**By:** Camille McPherson

**For:** Victor Harris

**By:** Alan Mucatel

**For:** Camilla Euphame Newcomb

**By:** Alan Mucatel

**For:** James Douglas Richards

**By:** Alan Mucatel

**For:** Shannon Robinson

**By:** Alan Mucatel

**For:** Shirley Castro

**By:** Alan Mucatel

**For:** Milton Myers

**By:** Sheila Myers-Danyluk

**For:** Shirley Castro

**By:** Jose Reyes

**For:** James Douglas Richards

**By:** Linda Rosenthal

**For:** Dorothy Wesson

**By:** Lois Simmonds

**For:** Shirley Trent

**By:** Celestine Trent

**For:** Marcellus White

**By:** Marvin White



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## Help Brighten the Season for Children and Teens!



It's not too late to join the **Leake & Watts Annual Toy Drive!**

Participating in our holiday toy drive is often the highlight of the year for many of our supporters. The thousands of toys and gift cards that we distribute each year help brighten the season for over 1,000 children in foster care and family stabilization programs, 300+ youth at our special education schools, 500 young children at our preschool programs for low-income families, and over 200 children and young adults with developmental disabilities.

### HERE IS HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- You can volunteer to personally sponsor a classroom/s and distribute toys and gifts to the children at one of our schools or child care programs.
- You can directly fill a child's holiday wish by responding to a letter to Santa from a child in foster care.
- You can choose your own gift and make an individual contribution of toys and/or gift cards, including dolls, cars, board games, crafts, books and anything else that the kids would enjoy.
- If you have the opportunity to collect donations at your workplace or house of worship, we can help you organize and host your own toy drive on our behalf.
- You may also send a donation directly to our Development Office at 463 Hawthorne Avenue, Yonkers, New York 10705 so that our staff can purchase and distribute toys and gift cards to the youth and arrange holiday events for the children and families in our programs.

If you would like to donate any of these items, organize your own toy drive, help fund and/or arrange a holiday event, or help distribute the toys, please contact the Leake & Watts Development Office at **914.375.8605** or **[development@leakeandwatts.org](mailto:development@leakeandwatts.org)**.

