

NYC Customer Service Newsletter

Volume 7 issue 1 – June 2015

2014 Excellence in Customer Service Awards Ceremony

The 2014 Excellence in Customer Service Awards Ceremony was held on March 4 at the Manhattan Surrogate's Court Building. The ceremony recognized agency honorees, and other City staff who made contributions to key Mayoral initiatives – Paid Sick Leave, Free Universal Pre-K, Vision Zero and Language Access. In total, over 90 City staff were recognized. Each honoree received a certificate signed by Mayor de Blasio.



Mayor's Office of Operations Director Mindy Tarlow addresses 2014 Excellence in Customer Service honorees

The awards ceremony was attended by more than 200 people, including the honorees, agency heads, and agency Customer Service Liaisons. The ceremony was hosted by Mindy Tarlow, Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations. Anthony Shorris, First Deputy Mayor and Richard Buery, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives both spoke. Refreshments were provided and photographers from the Fire and Buildings Departments were available for the attendees.



Transportation's Vision Zero Street Team at the 2014 Excellence in Customer Service Awards ceremony

Some examples of special project honorees included:

- Juana Abreu from Consumer Affairs, for helping make Paid Sick Leave a reality for small business employees;
- Chief John Regan from the Fire Department for leading that agency's inspection efforts to ensure that Universal Pre-K sites were safe;
- Xuchun Lin from the Department of Probation and Isabel Lucido from NYCHA for providing translation and interpretation as members of the Volunteer Language Bank; and
- Brian Sullivan from the Parks Department and Sylvia Chan from the Department of Education for providing excellent assistance to the Language Access Secret Shoppers who visited their services and pretended to not know English.



Consumer Affairs (DCA) agency honoree Debra Halpin, First Deputy Mayor Anthony Shorris, DCA Commissioner Julie Menin, and Paid Sick Leave honoree Juana Abreu.

Top Service Center Performers Assist the Department of Education's New Family Welcome Centers Initiative

The Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH), two agencies with excellent performance in customer service centers, shared their experiences and ideas with staff from the Department of Education (DOE) to help the DOE establish its new Family Welcome Centers (see related story below). At the request of the Mayor's Office of Operations, DOT and OATH participated in a session where they shared best practices and provided advice based on years of experience improving the way they provide service at their walk-in centers.

Tailored to meet the needs of the DOE project leaders, the session focused on:

- Improving customer relationships and establishing workplace values
- Maximizing output from existing staff and managing the change to new roles and responsibilities
- Using customer feedback and multi-lingual surveys to measure performance and identify customer needs
- Identifying facility improvements to adapt to new responsibilities

DOE, OATH and DOT expressed interest in continuing the exchanges. This mutual exchange of ideas will ensure that all participating agencies continue improving their practices to provide the best service possible to their customers. Plans are underway to videotape the sessions to create a training video illustrating customer service best practices at New York City's public service centers.

DOT was well represented at the session with staff from Equal Employment Opportunity; Accessibility; Highway Inspections and Quality Assurance; Permit Management; and Parking and Permits. Staff from OATH and the Mayor's Office of Operations were also present.



Participants at the best practices session at DOT's conference room exchange ideas to help DOE with their new Family Welcome Centers

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Hosts Two Training Sessions

As reported in the last newsletter, in 2015 the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) will host a series of training sessions around language access issues. The purpose of the sessions is to provide key agency staff with the tools and information needed to support Mayor de Blasio's language access priorities.

Introductory Training – Immigrant Populations in New York City

On January 21, 2015, MOIA held the first language access training session for senior staff, language access coordinators and other agency staff. Joe Salvo, Director of the Population Division at the NYC Department of City Planning, reviewed NYC's immigrant populations, including demographics around individuals with Limited English Proficiency, and discussed how agencies can be more effective in serving these populations. Salvo displayed maps that pinpointed the leading languages and immigrant populations by neighborhood.



Attendees at first MOIA training session view DCP map showing language variances by borough

Azi Khalili, Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives at MOIA, described the new language access complaint process available via 311, and how agencies can respond to these complaints. The new complaint process went live on April 1st. Language access advocates have been updated on the initiative. When in place, individuals who do not receive interpretation service when needed can now file a complaint via 311. MOIA and the Mayor's Office of Operations will track complaints and work with the agencies to ensure that they are resolved.

And finally, Kavita Pawria-Sanchez, Assistant Commissioner at MOIA, reviewed federal and local laws around language access, including mandates for City agencies through Executive Order 120, Local Law 73 and Title V.

The second training session occurred on March 24, 2015 and focused on the need for plain language and the impacts that difficult-to-comprehend documents have on populations with low literacy and limited English proficiency.

Second Training Session - Limited English proficiency, Low Literacy and Plain Language

On March 24, 2015, MOIA hosted a two-hour training for general counsels, directors of communications and language access coordinators on plain language. Over 110 people attended this event and it was a huge success.

Azi Khalili, the Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives at MOIA, opened by noting that language access is one of the Mayor's priorities and that the City is committed to eliminating language barriers to promote the general welfare of all New Yorkers. State-of-the-art language access programs must start with clear and effective, easy-to-read English documents. Numerous errors in translation occur because the original English text is full of jargon, agency legalese, or is overly wordy or simply written with vague language that is open to multiple interpretations. And when the quality of communication – in any language – is not what it should be, we fail to get our message to its intended audience, resulting in lower rates of compliance and ultimately less ability to achieve the Mayor's ambitious agenda for all New Yorkers.

Khalili stated that the goal of "plain language" is just that: to enable City agencies to better achieve their missions through more effective communications with constituents. "We want every New Yorker who reads a City document to understand it well enough to be able to take appropriate action. We want to eliminate the results of poorly written documents: people making errors when filling out forms, calling 311 looking for help with what is written in the document, not appearing in person or submitting required information, not complying with agency rules and requirements, etc. Though no one knows the total cost of poor communication, the information we have suggests it is unnecessarily high. Writing in plain language isn't easy, but it pays off in creating good outcomes for New Yorkers and in greater efficiency in our customer service efforts."



Peter Lobo from the Department of City Planning explains data on immigration trends, limited English proficiency and illiteracy

In New York City 50% of New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home and 23% of New Yorkers are limited English proficient. Anthony Tassi, the Executive Director of Literacy Partners, noted that 45% of NYC adults read at an 8th grade level or below, and that reading skills trail the last year of schooling by two to up to five years.

The average City document requires an 11th grade reading level to understand, which is above the reading level of 45% of the City's adult population. In addition, many City documents are written in technical, formal, or impersonal language that is not always as clear, concise and customer-focused as it could be. Documents written at a high level with complex English are much more prone to errors in translation, undermining the goals of language access. Often, staff who oversee translations do not fully understand the English original to adequately assess the accuracy of the translation.

The combination of illiteracy and limited English proficiency create a substantial challenge to effective communication. Many City agency writers have met this challenge by adhering to six elements of clear and effective communication:

1. **Every document has a clear purpose** that is evident from the title, overall document design or from skimming the first few sentences;
2. **Only relevant information is included** that is required to achieve the purpose of the document (i.e., for the reader to take appropriate action); typical readers have a very low threshold for information overload; everything readers need to know should be included, but nothing more;
3. **Plain or simple language** is used that avoids jargon, abstract or metaphorical words and overly formal or "important-sounding" language in favor of a helpful, conversational tone with mostly common words that have tangible meaning and short explanations of jargon or technical terms that are required;
4. **Active voice** is used in most cases to make clear who is doing, deciding, etc., and who is responsible and accountable for results;
5. **Clean design makes documents easier to read** with large font, limited use of bold print, numbered lists, lots of white space, short paragraphs with headings, etc.; documents that are visually appealing with photos or graphics as appropriate are more likely to be read; and
6. **Appropriately low reading level** that is achieved by using smaller words, shorter sentences, and fewer sentences in each paragraph; reading level of any document can be assessed using spell check in Microsoft Word.

For more information on these trainings and to receive a copy of [Easy to Read NYC- Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communications](#) please contact Azi Khalili, Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives, at akhalili@moia.nyc.gov.

Department of Education Converts Borough Enrollment Offices to Family Welcome Centers

In December 2014, the Department of Education's (DOE) Office of Student Enrollment made the transition to support Chancellor Fariña's goal to engage families in every aspect of school life by converting borough enrollment offices to Family Welcome Centers. The Family Welcome Centers are part of the Office of Student Enrollment's mission to increase access to high quality schools for all New York City students.

Staff members at 13 Family Welcome Centers across the five boroughs help over 100,000 families each year with enrollment, transfer, and admission processes. They will now help families learn about other DOE services that support their child, including transportation, after-school programs, school food, immunizations, and adult education.

Learn more by visiting: nyc.gov/schools/WelcomeCenters or calling 718-935-3500. If you would like to visit a Family Welcome Center, please contact Kathryn Lattimer, Executive Director for Customer Service Strategy, at klattimer@schools.nyc.gov.



Multi-language welcome sign for Family Welcome Centers

Fire Department Announces New Initiatives to Help Protect Senior Citizens and to Teach CPR to New York City Teens

In October 2014, Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro visited the quarters of Engine 95/Ladder 36 to remind all New Yorkers to change the batteries in their smoke and carbon monoxide detectors when they change their clocks for the end of Daylight Saving Time, as well as to announce a new fire safety effort in all five boroughs: the Senior Citizens Alarm Installation Campaign.

For the Department's newly launched Senior Citizens Alarm Installation Campaign, members from the FDNY's Fire Safety Education Unit will hold fire safety presentations and visit homes to conduct fire safety reviews and install smoke/carbon monoxide and hard-of-hearing alarms in neighborhoods identified as most vulnerable to fire.



Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro speaks to the crowd about the importance of fire safety

Adults aged 65 or older, who, while representing only 17 percent of the population, comprised 40 percent of fire deaths in New York City in 2013. The Senior Citizens Alarm Installation Campaign is funded by a \$686,000 grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency secured with the support of New York Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand.

In December, the FDNY launched a joint CPR training initiative with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and NYC Service at the FDNY High School for Fire and Life Safety. The goal of the new initiative is to teach 5,000 New York City high school students compressions-only CPR.

This new life-saving educational program, called "Be 911: Teens Take Heart," is the first of its kind in New York City. It is taught by the FDNY Mobile CPR Training Unit and funded by more than \$100,000 in grants from NYC Service and FDNY Foundation. Several students took a compressions-only CPR lesson during the ceremony to launch the campaign.

Fire Department Announces Year-Long Observance of 150th Anniversary

At the end of the year, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro announced the city's year-long celebration of the FDNY's 150th anniversary in 2015.

The Fire Department of New York, established as a paid professional organization in 1865, will host a series of events throughout the year, including multiple community-based events. They will be designed both as a celebration of the Department's history of service and to encourage young men and women to pursue the extraordinary public service careers available in the Department as firefighters, paramedics and EMTs.

FDNY's 150th anniversary events will be funded by the FDNY Foundation. Funds raised by the FDNY Foundation during this year-long celebration will support free fire safety education and CPR classes for all New Yorkers, as well as important training initiatives for FDNY staff.

Watch the official anniversary video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6izRdk-OHU>

NYC311 has Record Breaking Year in 2014

For a city that never sleeps, New York City has a Contact Center that can match the demand. Setting a record in 2014, NYC311 received over 28 million contacts via calls, texts, the mobile app, chat and online visits. This number surpasses the previous record in 2011 by 16%.

"This unprecedented number of customer contacts is a testament to the extraordinary daily efforts of our 311 team to inform the public on all City matters and deliver essential services to New Yorkers in every neighborhood," said Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Customers connected with 311 for information on a host of issues including the top new programs in 2014: Pre-K, Affordable Care, and Paid Sick Leave. This record growth of contacts 311 is a testament to the dedicated staff at 311 and something that they take pride in. "NYC311 is committed to meeting our customers where they are and providing excellent customer service," said NYC311 Executive Director Joseph Morrisroe.

New Yorkers can connect with 311 by:

- Visiting [311 Online](#).
- Texting 311-692.
- Calling 311 or (212) NEW-YORK, (212) 639-9675, from outside New York City.
- Skyping NYC311.
- Contact 311 using a Video Relay Service (VRS) at (212) NEW-YORK, (212) 639-9675.
- Contacting 311 using TTY or Text Telephone at (212) 504-4115.
- Following 311 on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).
- Downloading 311's [iPhone](#) or [Android](#) app

Meeting the Challenges of Providing Language Services in City Jails

The New York City Department of Correction takes seriously the responsibility to address the communication needs of all detainees in its facilities, including those who are limited English proficient. The Department has contracts with vendors to create written material in various languages, as well as telephonic language interpretation for family who visit detainees.

To support these efforts to provide limited English proficient detainees the services they need, the Department identified multi-lingual staff on all facility rosters who were willing to volunteer and created the Language Service Team (LST), which provides additional staff at each facility to translate or interpret. The LST is staffed by Correction Officers and civilians and is on call 24/7. Volunteers are recruited through individual initiative, by supervisors, fraternal organizations, Academy instructors and peers.

Today 25 staff are active on the LST and can translate or interpret 17 languages: Polish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese Chinese, Urdu, French, Spanish, Punjabi, Taiwanese, German, Italian, Portuguese, Korean, Fukienese, Haitian Creole, Ukrainian, and Yoruba. Retired LST staff and non-LST members provide languages which include Turkish, Tamil, Sinhalese and Vietnamese. Facility rosters also include Edo, Hebrew, Arabic, Armenian, Romanian, and Hindi language coverage.

Since 1999, the LST has responded to more than 500 requests, both internal and external, for language services. In addition to these officially recorded requests, in the course of their daily work LST staff routinely provide translation and interpretation.

The Department will continue to work with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and other offices to ensure that detainees in its care get the language services they need.

Record Number of Service Centers Inspected Receive Perfect Score

In 2014, 60 sites that were inspected by the Street Condition Observation Unit Team (SCOUT) during the Customers Observing and Reporting Experience (CORE) inspections received perfect scores of 100. This is a significant increase from the seven that received a perfect score in 2010. SCOUT inspectors check facility conditions, customer service interactions and language access signage. Centers with perfect receive a certificate of recognition signed by the Mayor.

Walk-in service centers receiving a perfect score include:

| Agency | Service Category | Address | Borough |
|--|--|--------------------------------|---------------|
| City Commission on Human Rights | NYC Human Rights Community Service Center | 1932 Arthur Avenue | Bronx |
| Civilian Complaint Review Board | Intake Center | 100 Church Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Citywide Administrative Services | Manhattan Computer-based Testing and Applications Center | 2 Lafayette Street | Manhattan |
| Department for the Aging | Senior Employment Services | 40 Worth Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Buildings | Special Enforcement Unit | 280 Broadway, 5th Floor | Manhattan |
| Department of Buildings | Scaffold Safety Team | One Centre Street, 23rd Floor | Manhattan |
| Department of Buildings | The Development Hub | 80 Centre Street, 3rd Floor | Manhattan |
| Department of Buildings | Borough Office | 10 Richmond Terrace, 2nd Floor | Staten Island |
| Department of Education | District Office | 501 Courtlandt Avenue | Bronx |
| Department of Education | District Office | 557 Pennsylvania Avenue | Brooklyn |
| Department of Education | District Office | 355 Park Place | Brooklyn |
| Department of Education | Enrollment Center | 333 7th Avenue | Manhattan |
| Department of Education | District Office | 166 Essex Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Education | Enrollment Center | 28-11 Queens Plaza North | Queens |
| Department of Education | Enrollment Center | 30-48 Linden Place | Queens |
| Department of Education | District Office | 90-27 Sutphin Boulevard | Queens |
| Department of Education | Enrollment Center | 715 Ocean Terrace | Staten Island |
| Department of Finance | Manhattan Business Center | 66 John Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Health and Mental Hygiene | Immunization Clinic | 1826 Arthur Avenue | Bronx |
| Department of Health and Mental Hygiene | Early Intervention Office | 90-27 Parsons Boulevard | Queens |
| Department of Transportation | Permit Office | 55 Water Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Transportation | Parking and Customer Service | 28-11 Queens Plaza North | Queens |
| Department of Transportation | Highway Inspection and Quality Assurance | 120-55 Queens Boulevard | Queens |
| Department of Transportation | Permit Office | 10 Richmond Terrace, 2nd Floor | Staten Island |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Bronx Permit Office | 1 Bronx River Parkway | Bronx |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Owen Dolen Recreation Center | 2551 Westchester Square | Bronx |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Metropolitan Recreation Center | 261 Bedford Avenue | Brooklyn |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Thomas Jefferson Recreation Center | 2180 1st Avenue | Manhattan |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Tony Dapolito Recreation Center | 3 Clarkson Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Chelsea Recreation Center | 430 W 25th Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | Arsenal Basement Permit Office | 830 Fifth Avenue | Manhattan |
| Department of Parks and Recreation | AI Oerter Recreation Center | 131-40 Fowler Avenue | Queens |
| Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence | NYC Family Justice Center, Bronx | 198 East 161st Street | Bronx |
| Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence | NYC Family Justice Center, Manhattan | 80 Centre Street | Manhattan |
| Fire Department of New York | Public Records | 9 Metrotech Center | Brooklyn |
| Human Resources Administration | SNAP | 30 Thornton Street | Brooklyn |
| Human Resources Administration | Office of Child Support Enforcement Borough Office | 1 Metrotech Center | Brooklyn |

| Agency | Service Category | Address | Borough |
|--|--|---------------------------|----------------|
| Human Resources Administration | SNAP | 4055 10th Avenue | Manhattan |
| Human Resources Administration | Medicaid Office | 520-530 West 135th Street | Manhattan |
| Human Resources Administration | Office of Child Support Enforcement Family Court | 151-20 Jamaica Avenue | Queens |
| Human Resources Administration | Job Center | 219 Beach 59th Street | Queens |
| Human Resources Administration | SNAP | 32-20 Northern Boulevard | Queens |
| Human Resources Administration | Job Center | 34-00 Northern Boulevard | Queens |
| Human Resources Administration | Medicaid Office | 215 Bay Street | Staten Island |
| New York City Housing Authority | Resident Employment Services | 787 Atlantic Avenue | Brooklyn |
| New York City Housing Authority | Minority-owned, Women-owned and Small Business Enterprises (MWSBE) | 90 Church Street | Manhattan |
| New York City Housing Authority | Prevailing Wage Enforcement | 250 Broadway | Manhattan |
| New York City Housing Authority | Services for People with Disabilities | 250 Broadway | Manhattan |
| New York City Housing Authority | Investigation of Equal Employment & Fair Housing Discrimination Complaints | 250 Broadway | Manhattan |
| New York Police Department | Rifles and Firearms Licensing | 120-55 Queens Boulevard | Queens |
| Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings | Branch Office | 9 Bond Street, 7th Floor | Brooklyn |
| Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings | Branch Office | 66 John Street | Manhattan |
| Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings | Health Tribunal Branch Office | 66 John Street | Manhattan |
| Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings | Branch Office | 350 St. Marks Place | Staten Island |
| Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings | Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings | 100 Church Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Small Business Services | NYC Business Solutions Center | 400 East Fordham Road | Bronx |
| Department of Small Business Services | Workforce 1 Expansion Center | 10 Grand Army Plaza | Brooklyn |
| Department of Small Business Services | NYC Business Solution Center | 79 John Street | Manhattan |
| Department of Small Business Services | Workforce 1 Expansion Center | 41-17 Main Street | Queens |
| Department of Small Business Services | Workforce 1 Expansion Center | 3845 Richmond Avenue | Staten Island |

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