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**CORRECTED RUSH TRANSCRIPT: FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE TO MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE CONNECTIONS TO CARE INITIATIVE**

**First Lady Chirlane McCray:** Thank you, Gabrielle. And good morning everyone.

This is a fantastic day. I am so happy and I am delighted to be here at the Red Hook Initiative – a grassroots organization with a very special community bond that has grown even stronger in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. That bond, forged over years of shared struggle and shared achievements has laid a really sturdy foundation here for Connections to Care. With Connections to Care, we will bring mental health treatment into trusted community-based organizations, like this one, that are already providing other services to some of our most vulnerable city neighbors.

Connections to Care is at the very center of ThriveNYC — our plan to begin changing the way people think about mental health and substance abuse disorders, and the way the city government delivers services. Today, we take a huge leap forward in our journey to embed resources in the places where New Yorkers live, work, play, and go for help because today, we are announcing our new partners on Connections to Care.

The first big news is that we have selected 14 organizations – 14 outstanding organizations. All of them provide services that range from daycare to workforce development. And together they reach people across all five boroughs, which is crucial because this public health crisis knows no borders.

Each organization will bring in experts from partner institutions to train their staff members. And the training will cover – how to identify people who are vulnerable, who are in vulnerable populations, who might be suffering from a mental health condition, how to provide immediate help, and how to connect people to appropriate ongoing treatment. But, before we tell you more about the great work we will be doing together there are some thank you's and praise in order.

And I would like to start with the 14 organizations that are embracing this opportunity to serve as pioneers in this innovative approach to providing mental health services. They are all so wonderful and I am going to shout them out, each one by name, in alphabetical order:

[Laughter]

The Arab American Association of New York

[Applause]

Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Incorporation

[Applause]

CAMBA

[Applause]

Center for Employment Opportunities

[Applause]

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families

[Applause]

Hetrick-Martin Institute

[Applause]

Hudson Guild

[Applause]

Our host, Red Hook Initiative

[Applause]

Safe Horizon

[Applause]

Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services

[Applause]

STRIVE International

[Applause]

Adore

[Applause]

The HOPE Program

[Applause]

Voces Latinas

Now that's a pretty stellar line up, right? Let's give them all another round of applause.

[Applause]

I also want to thank some of our other valued partners who are here with us today, starting with Felix Ortiz, Assistant Speaker of the New York State Assembly.

[Applause]

Assistant Speaker Ortiz is a fierce champion for Red Hook, and I am so glad that he has our back on this. Putting together an initiative this far-reaching requires a lot of support.

Now, the bedrock of Connections to Care is a \$10 million social-innovation grant we received from the Corporation for National and Community Service, which is doing visionary work. And that grant is the centerpiece of a \$30 million public-private partnership that is being spearheaded by Gabrielle who you just heard from, Darren Block, and their top-notch team at the Mayor's Fund which I am honored to chair. We are also deeply grateful to the Chapman Perelman Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. Marilyn Simons of the Simons Foundation, and the Benificus Foundation for supporting this work.

Please give them some applause.

And none of this would be possible without the hard work and expertise of three Team de Blasio stars.

[Laughter]

And they are Deputy Mayor Richard Buery, who you will hear from in just a bit.

[Applause]

Dr. Gary Belkin, Executive Deputy Commissioner for Mental Hygiene and one of the chief architects of ThriveNYC.

[Applause]

And Matthew Klein, Executive Director of the Center for Economic Opportunity.

[Applause]

The next partner I want to thank is also the newest. And their extremely generous gift is a big part of today's announcement. It is my pleasure to report that the Ford Foundation has awarded a two million dollar grant to support evaluation and technical assistance to Connections to Care.

[Applause]

The evaluation will be conducted by the RAND Corporation and the NYU McSilver Institute. And as you know – as you may know the Ford Foundation is already on the frontlines of the movement to end inequality, and they know that connecting folks to high-quality mental health resources is really crucial to that mission. So, winning their support is a very big deal.

So, Darren could you step forward, please.

[Laughter]

Can we get a round of applause for the Ford Foundation?

[Applause]

He is really a world-class president. So, we have such deep appreciation for what he is doing.

[Laughter]

Don't blush.

Now, in order to fully understand how Connections to Care will transform the lives of New Yorkers who might otherwise suffer in silence, you really need to hear from some of our new partners, and you will very soon.

But to fully appreciate why this initiative is so important, you also need to see it from a citywide perspective. And for me, the groundbreaking potential of Connections to Care can be summed up with one big number – 40,000. That is how many New Yorkers will receive mental health care over the next five years with this initiative. That means 40,000 New Yorkers who will be able to talk about their issues and challenges in a place they trust, with people they trust. That means 40,000 New Yorkers who will hear, perhaps for the first time that mental illness is treatable. And that means 40,000 New Yorkers who won't be forced to search for treatment on their own. And 40,000 is only a start. Thanks to the Ford Foundation, we will gain a wealth of information on what works and what doesn't. We can then use that information to bring more mental health resources to more community-based organizations. And I want you to know that could make for some really interesting innovation because New York City is home to more than 35,000 non-profits. So, just imagine – imagine how much good we could do, how many lives we could save, how many lives we improve, if every one of those nonprofits was staffed by people with mental health training. That, my friends, is the future the people of this city deserve.

And it is now my great pleasure to introduce someone who will help us create it, Tanya Wilson. Tanya is a social work coordinator right here at the Red Hook Initiative. She's also a proud Red Hook native who brings a lifetime's worth of credibility to her job. So, please join in me in welcoming Tanya for all her hard work.

[Applause]

[...]

**Deputy Mayor Richard Buery, Strategic Policy Initiatives:** Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Assemblyman. We're going to open it up to some questions.

Any questions from the press?

In the back.

**Question:** Just one question – when is the training expected to start?

**Deputy Mayor Buery:** So, the training is going to start over the next – I think in the next few months. [Inaudible] let the First Lady answer.

**First Lady McCray:** We expect training to begin in the next 90 days at some of the organizations. It will vary by organization but within the next 90 days.

**Question:** And that'll [inaudible] years?

**First Lady McCray:** Yes, [inaudible].

Questions?

**Deputy Mayor Buery:** Any other questions?

We did such a great job of explaining it?

[Laughter]

Marcia.

**Question:** I just wonder the effect that you think this is going to have on public safety and some of the other issues that have confronted the city so far even in the last few weeks, and the big contribution it can make to making people feel safer on the streets.

**First Lady McCray:** Well, you know – let me [inaudible]. I don't feel short but –

[Laughter]

It's, you know, we didn't get into this situation overnight so we're not going to get out of it overnight. But obviously, if we can prevent mental illness from spiraling into more serious mental illness, it's going to have a huge effect on public safety, on education – everywhere you look actually – employment. Because not having good mental health is such a huge barrier to success and any area. It's a barrier when children walk into the classroom and they can't do their work. It's a barrier especially to young adults who can't work, right, they can't work and they're not getting any treatment, and they're out on the street or they have – they don't have anything to do because they can't do anything. And of course they become a problem to their communities. So, it's going to have a very big effect. It won't happen overnight but as we drill down and roll out these programs I expect that everyone will feel that it will affect their lives.

**Question:** What's the biggest problem in overcoming the stigma people feel about getting help?

**First Lady McCray:** Well, the biggest problem with the stigma is that nobody talks about it. Right? I mean, to me, that's the biggest problem and we're starting this campaign to get people to talk openly about anxiety, depression, substance misuse, all of the various types of mental illness. So, people actually have – it will take the mystery out of mental illness. So much of what people fear is the unknown, right? They don't know what mental illness is. Why is somebody hearing voices? Why are they acting in this strange way? We fear that which we don't understand. So, part of ThriveNYC is to educate people, to raise the awareness about the different types of mental illnesses, the signs and symptoms of them. And so people will – also let people know, look, this is very common. This is more common than the flu, more common analogy –

[Laughter]

So, people will become more comfortable with seeking treatment.

Do you want to – ?

**Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation:** I want to just say that I think when you look overtime at how – what are the barriers for big transformations like this? It's culture – culture and cultural practice. And when you look overtime at what changed the public's view on alcoholism or breast cancer – so when Betty Ford talked about, publically, that she was an alcoholic. It brought from out of the corners and behind closed doors, a conversation that many of our families were dealing with but because of culture, the culture of silence and shame, we didn't talk about alcoholism.

Breast cancer – the same thing. When prominent women started talking about their issues with breast cancer it became possible for women to talk publically about something they were silent about.

When the First Lady took a microphone and talked about mental health, that's a moment for potential transformation. When a highly esteemed, admired, public figure speaks out from personal experience about something that we know exists in our culture but we are ashamed or because there is such stigma attached to it, we refuse to come out and talk about it. Well she has made it possible for New Yorkers to talk about this without shame or stigma. And that I think is the biggest barrier, Marcia. And I think this is the transformational moment that comes from having a First Lady like Chirlane McCray.

**Question:** [Inaudible] by shining the light of day on a problem, you're getting people to understand that there is no shame, and that they should be happy or able to come forward and get the help that you're going to provide for them?

**Walker:** That they should seek help. That it is, in fact, a sign of strength that you seek help because you see people you admire who are seeking help or who have family members who they are helping to seek help. And so, it's a virtuous, positive circle that we're trying to get started here. And I think the First Lady has an initiated that for all New Yorkers.

**Question:** So, in a sense you're saying there shouldn't be any stigma?

**Walker:** Absolutely. That has been her mantra. That there is no shame in needing mental help. That we all have, either individually or we're married to someone or we love someone who has an issue. And there is, as she said we love people who have a broken arm or we love people who got in a car accident and have to do rehab. Well, we love people who have a mental health issue too and we need to help them the same we help the person who has a broken arm or is dealing with any other mental or any other physical or health issue.

[Applause]

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