

For Immediate Release
#47-20

NEW YORK CITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PRESENTS THE READY NEW YORK OLDER ADULT CENTER OF THE YEAR AWARD TO GRACE AGARD HAREWOOD SENIOR CENTER IN BROOKLYN

The center prepared and delivered meals to its members, created a virtual program to keep the older adults engaged, and served as a cooling center during extreme temperatures in the summer

The [virtual ceremony](#) included remarks by NYCEM Commissioner Deanne Criswell, along with poetry and musical performances by the older adults

December 8, 2020 — As the coronavirus crisis steadily affected all aspects of New York City life in March, the restrictions to contain the spread of the pandemic left many vulnerable New Yorkers in danger of losing access to necessary services. Older adults were particularly at risk as the stay at home orders limited social interaction, delivery of goods and access to social services. Centers like the Grace Agard Harewood Neighborhood Senior Center became a lifeline for many older adults.

New York City Emergency Management and the New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) presented the Ready New York Older Adult Center of the Year Award to the Grace Agard Harewood Neighborhood Senior Center during a virtual ceremony on Monday, December 7. The eighth annual award recognizes an older adult center in the five boroughs that has made an ongoing commitment to preparing older adults for emergencies. The award ceremony included a performance by a steel pan band, a poetry reading and remarks from elected officials. You can watch the full ceremony [here](#).

The Grace Agard Harewood Center, located in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, received the award for its collaboration with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) during the pandemic. The center coordinated meal distribution for its NYCHA residents, created virtual programming for its members — which included cooking classes, yoga sessions, and Spanish lessons — and served as a cooling center during extreme heat during the summer. The center also participated in the City's Get Cool program, which ensured older adults and other vulnerable populations received air conditioners to keep cool during the summer.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, New Yorkers have found ways to support, and comfort family, friends, and neighbors who were facing unimaginable challenges. The staff of the Grace Agard Harewood Center have demonstrated the strength of the New York City community and their ability to adapt and thrive during a global emergency," said **New York City Emergency Management Commissioner Deanne Criswell**.

"Fort Greene Council services have been an anchor in the Brooklyn community for decades. Their center, Grace Agard Harewood, is an outstanding example of how Older Adult Centers rose to the challenges faced by many older adults who found themselves isolated during the pandemic," said **Department for the Aging Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez**. "Older Adult Centers have played a tremendous role in helping older New Yorkers during COVID-19. They pivoted from their regular programming and developed creative solutions to provide safe meal provisions and deliver services remotely, as well as offering virtual programming, which continues to keep older New Yorkers socially connected and engaged."

The Grace Agard Harewood Neighborhood Senior Center is part of the Fort Greene Council, Inc., (FGC) a nonprofit organization that provides services for various age groups. In Brooklyn, FGC provides services to

older adults from 13 older adult centers in seven community districts, one daycare center, and one after-school program.

“I’ve been working with seniors for 40 years and dealt with many emergencies, from power outages, winter storms, tornadoes and Hurricane Sandy. But COVID was different because no one was really prepared for a pandemic,” said **Grace Agard Harewood CEO and Executive Director Claudette Macy**. “What I learned from this emergency is that you have to jump into action and adapt. We hired a company to teach our seniors what technology skills they were missing, and we built a studio to offer daily zoom classes to keep them active and engaged. For those who live alone, it was a connection to the world and a break from the social isolation.”



Staff members from Grace Agard Harewood Center deliver Thanksgiving meals to older adults during the holiday. (Photo courtesy Fort Greene Council, Inc.)

Prior to the pandemic, the center offered lunch, dinner, and a wide range of social activities and outings. In the early days of the pandemic, the staff performed wellness calls to its members and later transitioned to offering virtual classes. In order to keep the members engaged and active, the center built a broadcast studio from where they offer virtual cooking, technology, language, yoga and fitness classes. For its members, the center played a pivotal role during a time when social isolation would have added to the mental and physical stress of the pandemic.

“When the center was open, I attended the computer classes and exercise activities. The pandemic was a very scary time for me because I live alone,” said center member Eleanor Pierre. “The classes are helping to keep my mind functioning and my body in good physical health.”



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