

THE HUNTS POINT *Express*

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EDUCATION

Families give thanks for after-school program

By [vjohnso1](#)



Photo by Venita Johnson

Students enjoyed an early Thanksgiving meal at The Point's annual celebration.

Children, parents and volunteers celebrate in gathering at The Point

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For families of students from Bronx Charter School for the Arts, St. Athanasius, MS 424 and PS 48, Thanksgiving came early.

They gathered at The Point CDC on Nov. 19, for a celebratory potluck dinner, joined by City Year, the organization of young volunteers who spend a year working with schoolchildren.

Elizabeth Colon brought chicken and beef empanadas. The after-school program at The Point, she said, made a huge difference to her nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth Rodriguez, who attended Saint Athanasius and now goes to the Saint Jerome.

The programs at The Point are, “fun and boring,” Elizabeth said—“fun because we make friends, boring because we have to do homework.”

“She used to be shy, and now she can’t stop talking!” her mother joked.

Growing serious, she said when she tells the City Year volunteers that Elizabeth is struggling with a particular class or homework, they work diligently to help her daughter.

City Year, which made The Point its local headquarters this year, partners with The Point’s school-based and after-school programs. Its volunteers, young people who spend 10 months working as tutors and mentors, guide students in The Point’s longstanding after-school programs and help fifth-graders with homework and reading.

“City Year acts as tutors and mentors to help lower the drop-out rate,” said volunteer Nicole Griffin.

Michael Hannon, who volunteers in the after-school program at Bronx Charter School and PS 48, called the dinner a way to bring children and friends together to share a community.

“The dinner is to get the children to connect in an organic, familiar way, and create a bond between teachers and parents,” said Earl Skinner, The Point’s youth programs coordinator.

Skinner began to clap rhythmically to get the attention of the children, who were playing tag and running around the long dinner tables. The call and response clapping is a familiar part of the children’s routine. When all eyes were on him, he shouted, “Raise your right hand if you are hungry.”

Most of the children raised two hands. They crowded around Skinner and clapped in rhythm as two volunteers sang India Aries’ “There’s Hope.”

After the song, Skinner asked everyone to hold hands to say grace. “These are the times that we have to cherish,” he said. “Think about all the things you have to be grateful for. For me, I feel very blessed to work in Hunts Point.”

“The reason for the event is the sense of giving back to the community,” said Michelle Tyndal, who teaches fifth grade at the Bronx Charter School. “They donated food and it’s very family-oriented here.”

Uncovered, the aluminum trays revealed pumpkin pie, baked chicken, chips, donuts, yams, fried chicken, BBQ chicken, macaroni and cheese, cheesecake and fruit.

One little boy had secretly stuffed five Oreos into his hand. City Year Participants fetched food for the children. Once they were fed, parents and adults jumped on to the line to get a plate.

Aeryanne Diaz, 11, a fifth grader at Saint Athanasius, was among the few children who waited patiently and quietly for the food. Asked what she liked about Thanksgiving, she said “We can eat. We can be thankful of everything we have. We can thank each other and eat together.”

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