

YWCA NorthEastern NY Receives Grant for New Natural Playground and Creative Curriculum for Early Learning Centers

Schenectady, NY, DATE – YWCA NorthEastern NY received a grant of the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation to help provide funds to construct a new, natural playground at the Washington Avenue Early Learning Center location. This grant will also provide new curriculum and equipment at both the Schenectady County Community College and Washington Avenue YWCA NENY ELC locations.

The playground will incorporate natural materials that inform the type of play and education that children actively participate in and encourages creative and healthy development. With this new playground, children will cultivate a stronger connection to the natural world at a young age and engage in STEM-related play by mixing natural elements together (e.g. making mud), learning about bugs and animals, gardening, and taking part in dramatic play. Natural playgrounds have been shown to be more beneficial for kids' cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development than traditional playgrounds.

“We are so excited about this project,” says **Nancy Johnson, YWCA NENY Early Learning Centers Director**, “we have been dreaming of a natural playground for our children, teachers, and families for years. We cannot wait to see how the children will grow and explore such a rich environment.”

The new Creative Curriculum provided with this grant will replace the decade old curriculum YWCA NENY Early Learning Centers are currently utilizing. This curriculum will be digitized and offer comprehensive learning activities for children, resources for parents, a digital cloud, and updates resources for teachers. The new curriculum equipment will include kits for dramatic play, arts, and outdoor play.

Additionally, this grant will cover the cost for all 20 YWCA NENY ELC teachers to attend the New York Association for the Education of Young Children (NYAEYC) Annual Conference in Verona, NY as well as lodging for the event. All ELC teachers will also receive Professional Development Teacher Memberships.

“We are thrilled to update our curriculum for our teachers and children and to be able to have all of our teachers attend the NYAEYC conference in 2023”, says **Rebecca Fitch, YWCA NENY Early Learning Center Assistance Director**. “This is providing us the opportunity to all develop more professional skills and growth for our teachers to bring back to the classrooms”.

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YWCA NorthEastern NY has been supporting women, children, and families in Schenectady County for 135 years. YWCA NorthEastern NY is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. For information on programs serving infants to seniors, please visit www.ywca-neny.org

The Mother Cabrini Health Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of New Yorkers, bolster the health outcomes of vulnerable communities, eliminate barriers to care, and bridge gaps in health services. Named after a tireless advocate for immigrants, children, and the poor, the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation funds programs and



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initiatives across New York State that either provide direct healthcare services or address the social determinants of health. For more information, visit <https://www.cabrinihealth.org/>