

# Improving Public Spaces and Services

Improving Public Spaces and Services (IPSS) is the Fund's civic contribution to its hometown of New York City. The program focuses on aspects of city living important to the daily life of all New Yorkers — the condition of their neighborhoods, the state of their parks, and the quality of their public services. The Fund looks for projects across the boroughs in which a relatively modest investment could yield a substantial community return, and where its support could stimulate further foundation backing. Particular attention is accorded proposals that have the added benefit of engaging the city's youth in productive activities.

Grants made in the last year reflect the Fund's strategic approach. The New York City Street Tree Consortium, Inc., expanded its tree care program through

a pilot apprentice project. Six apprentices, young men and women from the consortium's training programs, gained job experience and earned a stipend as they worked with community members to improve the appearance of city streets in Manhattan's Washington Heights. A grant to the Parks Council's Urban Conservation Corps allowed neighborhood youth to help build a community park in Brooklyn's East New York. Youngsters from local afterschool and summer camp programs created a bird sanctuary for use as an outdoor science workshop by nearby public schools.

Seed money helped Staten Island's Greenbelt Conservancy, Inc., attract additional funding to establish a full-scale nursery for its fledgling Native Plant Center. The nursery will provide the plant stock for restoring depleted wilderness areas in the New York metropolitan region. The Conservancy also took the first steps in establishing an urban environment internship program for high school students on Staten Island. Fund support to the Phipps Community Development Corporation allowed it to expand summer youth programs in three low income neighborhoods — West Farms and Crotona Park in the South Bronx and Bellevue South in Manhattan — as more families required supervised care for out-of-school children.

Engaging the community in improving the city's public spaces is an important focus of the Fund's IPSS program. The Horticultural Society of New York has formed partnerships with New York City's public library systems and botanical gardens to recruit and train neighborhood volunteers in maintaining the gardens of 13 Carnegie branch libraries, many in the city's poorest neighborhoods. Fund support allowed the Society to bring on board a part-time coordinator to manage the volunteers and ensure the gardens' seasonal planting and upkeep. The Queens Botanical Garden Society, Inc., under new leadership since 1994, has redefined its mission to relate to the needs of the garden's surrounding and rapidly growing Asian, Indian, and Hispanic communities. A Fund grant enabled the Garden to conduct a visitor survey as an initial step in determining the needs of its culturally diverse neighbors.

Promoting public/private partnerships has proved an effective means of stretching the limited public dollars available for maintaining city parks. A Fund grant allowed the Prospect Park Alliance, Inc., to join with the National Audubon Society of New York State in establishing the city's first Audubon Center in Prospect Park's 19th century boathouse. The center, which offers Audubon educational programs on preserving the natural habitats

of birds and wildlife, is expected to increase the park's audience base and enhance its revenue-generating capacity. Fund support to the Staten Island Botanical Garden, Inc., is matching New York State dollars in restoring a long-neglected 20-acre wetland preserve. At the northern tip of Manhattan in Washington Heights, the pre-Revolutionary 1.5-acre Roger Morris Park surrounds the historic Morris-Jumel Mansion. Viewed as an oasis by its surrounding communities, the park is being redesigned, with the help of a Fund planning grant, to meet the needs of local residents and more than 35,000 annual visitors.

The Commonwealth Fund is sensitive to the challenges facing New York City's large and diverse nonprofit sector. The Fund has been a consistent supporter of the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York (NPCC) since its founding in 1984. A singular resource for its 950 member organizations, NPCC serves as an advocate with state and local governments and helps small organizations establish shared services and purchasing arrangements. On the financial side, the Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF) provides infrastructure loans at below-market rates to small and medium-sized nonprofit organizations in the New York metropolitan area. In

1995, the Fund helped expand NFF's loan fund with a five-year recoverable grant. Since then, NFF has made \$18 million in targeted infrastructure and facilities loans to 92 New York institutions.

Helping parents choose the right public school for their children is an important service in a city with a school system of unparalleled size and complexity. Seed money from the Fund is helping Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., provide a web-based guide to New York City's public schools. Board of Education statistics, information from site visits, and the comments of teachers and parents provide a descriptive and factual look at some of the city's best-performing schools.

Through its Health Care in New York City Program, Improving Public Spaces and Services Program, Health Services Improvement Fund grants, national programs, communications program, President's Discretionary Fund, matching gifts by directors and staff, and core operating costs, the Fund spent approximately \$11.7 million, or 45 percent of its total budget, in New York City in 1999–2000. In addition to its economic investment, the Fund encourages the involvement of its board members and staff in efforts to improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers.



Health systems around the world are increasingly called upon to deliver high-quality, cost-effective care in a rapidly changing environment. This year, the Fund convened the health ministers of five industrialized countries—The Honorable Annette King (New Zealand), Secretary Donna E. Shalala

(United States), The Right Honorable John Denham (United Kingdom), The Honorable Allan Rock (Canada), and The Honorable Michael Wooldridge (Australia)—to share ideas about how their respective systems can safeguard quality and foster innovation.