

La Nueva Mayoría

By David R. Jones



Children's Aid Society Focuses Resources Where Most Needed

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February 24, 2011

In an age when tax deductions are routinely taken for charitable donations to such institutions as museums and universities, the Children's Aid Society stands out as an organization whose funds directly help poor New Yorkers. Since its founding in 1853, the Society has had a single mission: to serve New York City children living in poverty.

Last December, the Board of Trustees of the Children's Aid Society voted to sell the Philip Coltoff Center, including the school on Sullivan Street in Greenwich Village. The decision reflected the Society's need to focus its finite resources on low-income New York City neighborhoods. Average household income in Greenwich Village is nearly \$125,000, while one in four children in New York City is living in poverty; that's over 500,000 children living in households with income of less than \$18,530 for a family of three.

A lawsuit was filed in a bid to prevent the closure of nursery school programs run by the Society. A hearing to demand that the Society keep the preschool at the Center open until June 2013 was recently cancelled to give both sides an opportunity to discuss a settlement.

The Philip Coltoff Center opened in Greenwich Village in 1891 as an industrial school to serve the large population of immigrants living in the area. But the demographics of Greenwich Village have changed dramatically over the years. It has become one of the most affluent areas of the city as well as a neighborhood with one of the smallest number of black and Latino families in the city.

Over the years, the Society has relocated services repeatedly in order to be where the need is greatest. It has opened and shut facilities as community needs changed over time. The locations the Society operates now are not the same locations it occupied 100 years ago or even 50 years ago.

Children's Aid Society president and CEO Richard R. Buery explained: "We cannot meet the needs of all children in New York City. Every choice to serve children in one neighborhood is a choice not to serve those in another, and our mission requires us to make those choices in favor of children and communities with more limited resources."

The Society felt it must focus its efforts on communities such as the South Bronx, Washington Heights, Harlem, and East Harlem. In the Morrisania section of the South Bronx, it opened a health services hub, a teen center, foster care and preventive services offices as well as seven community schools within the last 10 years because the agency saw a great need for its services there.

The lawsuit was misguided and frivolous, especially considering the mission of the Society and the relative wealth of the families with children attending the nursery school at the Center. The Society has agreed to keep the nursery school open until the deadline for students who are already enrolled. In a

time of shrinking resources, insistence that the school continue to remain open denies help to children – particularly black and Latino children - living in low-income areas of the city.

The mission of the Children's Aid Society – to serve the city's children living in poverty – should be uppermost in any resolution of this situation.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 165 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.