



WANTED:

20,000 BACKPACKS FILLED WITH SCHOOL SUPPLIES FOR CHILDREN IN NEW YORK CITY HOMELESS SHELTERS

Volunteers of America-Greater New York Launches 13th Annual Operation Backpack[®] 2016

Drive to collect 20,000 backpacks & school supplies kicks off July 11th and runs through August 5th

(May 5, 2016–New York, NY) More than 20,000 children living in New York City homeless shelters face the prospect of starting school in September without the basic necessities like notebooks, dictionaries, protractors, compasses, calculators and flash drives – or even something to carry them in.

But **OPERATION BACKPACK[®]**, a program of **Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY)**, is making sure that every child living in a homeless shelter in the five boroughs is fully prepared when the school bell rings for the first time in September.

Starting on Monday, July 11th and running through Friday, August 5th, VOA-GNY is asking the public to purchase, fill and donate brand new, good quality backpacks and bring them to official drop locations across the City. VOA-GNY is also seeking financial donations to help fill the 10,000 empty backpacks donated by the NYC Department of Education with critically-needed, grade-specific supplies for students from pre-K through grade 12. The average cost of a filled backpack is \$81 – an expense very few families in homeless shelters can afford.

VOA-GNY's back-to-school project began in New York City in 1999 as a small effort to collect school supplies for vulnerable children in homeless shelters operated by the organization. After growing exponentially – the result of public support – the program was re-branded as OPERATION BACKPACK in 2004. The program now seeks to provide a backpack and supplies to every child in a homeless shelter who needs them. Last year, a record-breaking 19,400 fully-stocked backpacks were distributed to children living in more than 150 shelters. Since the program began, it is estimated that more than 120,000 children have benefited from the program.

OPERATION BACKPACK has also become a national model and has been replicated at VOA affiliates around the country.

Rachel Weinstein, VOA-GNY Vice President/Chief Development and Communications Officer, and founder of OPERATION BACKPACK, said, "Education is essential to breaking the devastating cycle of homelessness and unemployment. But the harsh reality is that too many homeless children are at an academic disadvantage because they cannot afford even the most basic school supplies. For 16 years, OPERATION BACKPACK has helped prepare hundreds of thousands of children for the start of the school year, allowing them to enter the classroom with confidence and the knowledge that someone believes in them."

"The success of OPERATION BACKPACK would not be possible without the incredible outpouring of support VOA-GNY receives from the public, from New York's business community and from our many community partners. VOA-GNY is committed to fulfilling every backpack request for every child in a homeless shelter who needs one, and we are counting on the continued support of our most valued partners" Weinstein added.

It is anticipated that more than 100 companies and community groups will participate in this year's campaign, with many new partners already signed up to support this program. Providing major support this year are **HSBC, HarperCollins Publishers, Duane Reade/Walgreens, the Agnes Varis Trust** and **the New York City Department of Education**. Generous in-kind sponsors include **RXR Realty** and **FedEx**.

Here's how to help:

- New Yorkers are urged to purchase and fill new backpacks and bring them to official drop locations from July 11th to August 5th. Visit www.OperationBackpackNYC.org for details on participating stores and to print out a list of supplies for each grade.
- Financial donations to VOA-GNY will help the charity purchase necessary items including flash drives, scientific calculators, student planners and more. Financial donations can be made at www.crowdrise.com/OperationBackpackNYC.
- For a list of VOA-GNY-approved grade-specific items to fill the backpack, please click here: <http://www.voa-gny.org/what-goes-in-a-backpack>.
- VOA-GNY is seeking additional corporate sponsors. To become a sponsor, please contact Rachel Weinstein at rweinstein@voa-gny.org or 212-496-4305.

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ABOUT VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK: **Volunteers of America (VOA)** has been at the forefront of social service since 1896, helping individuals and families in need across the country overcome obstacles to living safe, healthy and productive lives. Locally, tens of thousands of men, women and children in need benefit from **Volunteers of America-Greater New York's** life-changing, often life-saving work, including the homeless, families affected by domestic violence, children with special needs, adults living with HIV/AIDS, behavioral health or substance use issues, veterans struggling to find their footing and the frail elderly.

Media Contact: Colleen Roche, LAK Public Relations, Inc. 212.329.1413; croche@lakpr.com
Christa Sullivan, LAK Public Relations, Inc. 212.329.1405; csullivan@lakpr.com