



Volunteers of America®

GREATER NEW YORK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Glenna Freedman Public Relations, Glenna@glennafreedmanpr.com
(212) 730-0700, (917) 863-3833 (cell)

**VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK
LAUNCHES
OPERATION BACKPACK® 2015
TO HELP NEW YORK CITY'S HOMELESS CHILDREN**

**PUBLIC DRIVE TO COLLECT GOAL OF 20,000 BACKPACKS
AND SCHOOL SUPPLIES
RUNS JULY 13th through AUGUST 7th**

To download high resolution photos please log on to:

<https://app.box.com/s/qju6nb5htupcc5p716we>

(New York, NY) **Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY)** will launch **OPERATION BACKPACK® 2015**, its annual drive to collect new backpacks filled with brand new, grade-specific school supplies for thousands of children living in New York City's homeless and domestic violence shelters. **OPERATION BACKPACK®** kicks off on Monday, July 13th and will continue through Friday, August 7th. This year, with family homelessness at an all-time high, the organization's goal is to **outfit 20,000 New York City children with backpacks** in time for the first day of the school year. www.OperationBackpackNYC.org.

Since it was introduced in New York City, **OPERATION BACKPACK®** has steadily grown in response to the increasing number of families in homeless shelters. Although the campaign was started to meet the needs of the children living in **Volunteers of America-Greater New York** shelters, it has evolved to benefit children living in shelters run by other providers throughout New York City.

The average cost of a filled backpack is \$81, an expense few families in homeless shelters can afford. Receiving a filled backpack relieves parents of a financial burden and provides a sense of normalcy to the otherwise chaotic lives of their children. These backpacks give children the supplies they need to do their work, and allow them to go to school with more hope and confidence, looking and feeling more like their housed classmates and less like children in need.

Last year, with the extraordinary support from 150 companies and other community partners, **VOA-GNY** collected and distributed a record-breaking 18,400 backpacks to children in over 150 shelters across the city through **OPERATION BACKPACK®**. It is anticipated that at least 160 companies and community groups will participate in this year's campaign, with 20 new partners already signed up to support this important effort.

Each year, thousands of members of the general public also contribute to the campaign's success. **This year, the public is urged to drop off a new backpack and/or school supplies at select Duane Reade and Walgreens stores in New York City from July 13th to August 7th. Details of participating stores are soon-to-be-announced. To print out a list of the supplies required for each grade, please visit www.OperationBackpackNYC.org/fill. Financial support is vital to the campaign; donations can be made at www.OperationBackpackNYC.org.**

Joining Duane Reade and Walgreens, returning sponsor FedEx will donate its pick-up and drop-off services. On August 10th, FedEx employees will transport thousands of backpacks from participating corporate partners holding workplace drives to **VOA-GNY's OPERATION BACKPACK's**® sort space, officially ushering in Sort Week. During this time, hundreds of volunteers will prepare the backpacks for pick up by the shelters. The volunteers will also sort, according to grade level, the backpacks and supplies donated by the public and other corporate sponsors, to ensure delivery to the children in shelters in time for the first day of classes.

Additional returning sponsors include HSBC and the Duane Reade Charitable Foundation, and major in-kind sponsors including 21st Century Fox, Harper Collins, RXR Realty and Weeks Lerman.

The organization is seeking additional sponsors. If your company is interested in becoming a sponsor, please contact Rachel Weinstein at rweinstein@voa-gny.org or 212-496-4305.

Rachel Weinstein, **VOA-GNY** Vice President/Chief Development and Communications Officer, and founder of **OPERATION BACKPACK**® said, "We need to do everything we can to ensure the children in our care stay in school and earn a high school diploma, which is essential to breaking the cycle of homelessness. To do this, we strive to even the playing field for these kids and ensure they are prepared. For example, we are more than doubling the number of USB drives we are distributing because we know so many of our kids rely on libraries and public areas for computer access. Technology like this is critical to their keeping up with their classmates, feeling prepared and confident, and knowing that someone believes in them."

Paige Davis, host of TLC's "Trading Spaces" and OWN's "Home Made Simple", seasoned Broadway actor (*Chicago*, *Boeing Boeing* and recently the acclaimed *Dancing Lessons*) is a **VOA-GNY** Board Member and spokesperson for **OPERATION BACKPACK**®. "Each year I am inspired by the enormous effort on the part of **Volunteers of America** staff to provide this important service to homeless children citywide. And anyone can participate. You go to the store, select the perfect backpack, fill it with the supplies on the list **VOA** provides, and you know that a child will open it. A child who rarely gets anything new, that's not a hand-me-down. It's an honor for me to participate in this much-needed program and see the first day of school for young students become one of the best days of the year for them."

"**OPERATION BACKPACK'S**® important work with school-age children living in shelter helps to ensure that they have the same access to educational resources as do their peers," said NYC Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Gilbert Taylor. "We truly appreciate **Volunteers of America-Greater New York's** continued support of our families in shelter."

"It is essential that our students come into school prepared to achieve their full potential," said NYC Department of Education Chancellor Carmen Fariña. "By providing these important school supplies, **Volunteers of America-Greater New York**, through **OPERATION BACKPACK**®, is a key partner in helping so many students on to a path to success. I thank them for their tremendous efforts and their partnership to lift up New York City school children both in the classroom and beyond."

Volunteers of America affiliates across the country are conducting **OPERATION BACKPACK**® drives that will benefit children in many states and major metropolitan areas including: Chesapeake, VA; Delaware Valley; Greater Ohio; Northern California; San Francisco; Northern Nevada; Chicago; Michigan; Boston; Minneapolis; Western Washington; Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Mobile, Alabama and Portland, OR. For a full listing of participating affiliates, visit www.OperationBackpackUSA.org.

ABOUT OPERATION BACKPACK®

VOA-GNY's back-to-school effort began in 1999 as a small effort to collect school supplies for the children in its shelters. In 2001, with the support of the corporate community, the effort grew exponentially. In 2004, the campaign was re-branded "**OPERATION BACKPACK**®" to reflect its ambitious new goal: to give every child in the New York City shelter system who needs one a new backpack filled with grade-specific school supplies. Started in New York City, **OPERATION BACKPACK**® has been adopted by other **VOA** affiliates nationwide to help thousands of our country's most vulnerable students get off to a good start at school.

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.

www.OperationBackpackNYC.org

For more information regarding **Volunteers of America-Greater New York**, please visit www.voa-gny.org

TO WATCH VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA'S PSA with PAIGE DAVIS, go to <https://youtu.be/0Vr9Znmdlis>

TO WATCH KEVIN BACON's SUPPORT OF OPERATION BACKPACK visit: https://youtu.be/b2_mjig_5zU

###