

Blackstone School and St. Stephen's Build Warm Relationships Despite Frigid Cold

BY LIZ STEINHAUSER
ST. STEPHEN'S

On Monday, January 21, more than 130 people from over 20 community organizations ignored the arctic temperatures, donned winter boots, and made their way over to the Blackstone School for the annual MLK Day of Action. This is the ninth year that St. Stephen's Youth Programs (SSYP) has organized the day of support for the school, along with key partners City Year, Friends of the Blackstone, Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), several Episcopal churches, and the B-PEACE for Jorge Campaign.

The MLK Day of Action strives to advance the vision of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by combining work projects that improve the learning environment of the school with leadership workshops about issues of justice. This year, volunteers



SSYP Staff and Mass Promise Fellow Latasha Scott with young volunteers

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ASK DOG LADY



Advice on Pets, Life, Love

BY MONICA COLLINS

Dear Dog Lady,

You claim to be a big dog lover but I think you're a heartless beast.

I read in your column that you disapprove of dressing dogs in winter clothing. Your cockeyed rationale seems to be that dogs feel uncomfortable in clothes. Considering the recent low temperatures, are you revising your stance?

—Norman

Dear Norman,

Dog Lady insists it is redundant to put clothes on an animal, considering natural hair or fur can dress a dog naturally. They usually hate any outer garments. The only exception would be very small dogs with short-haired coats – such as Chihuahuas or Italian greyhounds – for which a

warm sweater on a very long walk might be a good idea. Even then, these hot-blooded dogs would probably much prefer their own coats to manufactured overcoats.

In cold weather, however, footwear on dogs is a very good idea. Protective layers on the paws insulate dogs from the salt and ice melt pellets that litter the sidewalks after a snowfall. These chemicals can burn, causing yelps of pain and animals holding up their feet. Here's a creative solution: Cut off the stems of small, deflated party balloons and fit the balloon bottoms snugly over her dog's

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SCOTUS upholds transgender military ban with a no "blanket ban"

REV. IRENE MONROE

With a conservative Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel A. Alito Jr., Neil M. Gorsuch and Brett M. Kavanaugh—it comes as no surprise that a 5-4 vote has revived Trump's discriminatory policy on transgender service members, while the merits of the cases will continue to be challenged in lower courts.

Last year President Trump's ban against transgender service members was delivered in his inimitable style of communicating to the American public the order in the form of a tweet:

"After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow

transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military," Trump tweeted. "Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you."

If Trump had his way, he would militarily eradicate transgender people from existence. Tuesday, Trump's Supreme Court delivered his wish in supporting the exclusion of transgender men and women.

But, the Court doesn't think so because its Orwellian argument is that the discriminatory policy is not a

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LIHC Investment Group Announces Agreement To Preserve Affordable Housing

SUBMITTED BY
LIHC INVESTMENT GROUP

BOSTON - Thursday, January 17, 2019 - LIHC Investment Group, one of the country's largest investors in affordable housing, and Mayor Martin J. Walsh together with the Boston Housing Authority, Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants (MAHT), and Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), today announced HUD approval of a creative plan to keep Concord Houses in the South End

affordable for at least the next 40 years, with the support of the building's tenants.

"As we build more affordable housing, it is critical that we do not lose sight of the need to preserve Boston's inventory of income-restricted housing," said Mayor Martin J. Walsh. "This agreement marks a positive resolution reached to keep these residents in their homes for decades to come. I thank all the

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Concord

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residents for their advocacy in raising this important issue, and all partners involved who helped ensure the long-term affordability and viability of the Concord Houses.”

“This agreement is the culmination of a multi-year effort to establish a new HUD program that will protect current and future residents of Concord Houses while providing funds for repairs and upgrades throughout the property,” said Charlie Gendron, Principal, LIHC Investment Group. “We appreciate the support we received from the tenants; Congress, especially the efforts of Sen. Susan Collins; HUD; the City of Boston; BHA; MAHT; and GBLs in our drive to preserve this property for future generations.” LIHC was instrumental in passing a key amendment to the FY 2018 HUD Appropriations Bill and securing HUD approval to fully finance the Concord Houses preservation plan.

Spanning two buildings located at 705-715 Tremont Street in the heart of the South End, Concord Houses has served as an important source of income-restricted housing in the South End for decades. In 2017, the HUD subsidy provisions governing the

property expired, putting it at risk of losing its long-term affordability.

Of the 181 households at Concord Houses, 171—or 95 percent of households—chose to sign a waiver to convert their Enhanced Vouchers (EVs) to a new project-based rental assistance (PBRA) contract to make the plan work. The new HUD contract ensures homes at Concord Houses will be reserved for individuals earning no more than 80 percent area median income (AMI) and is renewable for a total of 40 years.

The agreement also guarantees that current and future tenants pay no more than 30 percent of their income toward rent, which will actually reduce the rent burden for 30 existing households at the property. The remaining ten households will receive rent protections in the form of EVs administered by BHA.

“Preserving units of affordable housing like those at Concord House is a key element of Boston’s housing strategy,” said Roger Herzog, Executive Director of the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC), which works closely with DND on preservation issues and provided technical assistance in this case. “Congratulations to the City of Boston, the project residents, and LIHC Investment Group, and their partners,

for thinking creatively to find a way to keep Concord House affordable for individuals and families in the South End.”

“It’s a dream to secure permanently affordable housing here—not just for ourselves, but other people who will be here long after we’re gone,” said Pauline Durant, 85, a 20-year resident of Concord Houses and member of the Concord Houses Tenants Association. “It’s been a long journey. When tenants stay together and fight, we win!”

“We’re very elated by this victory,” added Adella Quinn, 76, a retiree from Fidelity Investments and 24-year resident of Concord Houses. “We’re losing too many people in the South End who are assets to the neighborhood due to rising rents. We need to come up with more ways like this to keep our community affordable.”

“This is an historic victory,” commented Michael Kane, Director of MAHT, which helped the tenants organize. Since 1983, MAHT has saved more than 12,450 homes like Concord Houses as affordable housing, one building at a time, through tenant organizing. “Saving affordable housing in the heart of the South End will help maintain the neighborhood’s racial and economic diversity well into the future. The 171 tenants who

signed up to preserve their apartments are to be commended for making this possible.” Kane also lauded LIHC and the City of Boston for supporting the tenants’ preservation plan and working creatively with Congress and HUD to make it work.

Attorneys for GBLs, Susan Hegeland Ann Jochnick, said they are pleased with the creative and collaborative process, which resulted in preserving much-needed affordable housing in the South End. “It’s a win for current and future tenants, a win for the city and a win for the owner. We hope that this may serve as a model for future preservation efforts.”

LIHC Investment Group is undertaking a \$7 million repair and capital improvement campaign at the property, which includes a new entry system and security cameras; flooring and ceiling replacement; lighting upgrades in the building’s common areas; and exterior work ranging from masonry repair to new fencing and landscaping. Under LIHC’s ownership, apartments in the building have already received new kitchen cabinets, granite countertops and appliances; upgraded bathroom fixtures, tubs, and tiles; and vinyl plank flooring.

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BFIT Awarded Skills Capital Grant Worth Nearly \$100,000

For AV Technology Program

SUBMITTED BY BFIT

The Baker-Polito Administration awarded Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT) a Skills Capital Grant of \$99,838 for the college's Audio Visual Technology program. BFIT is a small, private, affordable, nonprofit college dedicated to meeting the Massachusetts skills shortage by training and educating Greater Boston diverse, urban youth for well-paying jobs in today's high demand industries, such as the audio visual technology field, which the U.S. Bureau of Labor predicts will add more than 17,000 new jobs by 2024.

Audio Video Technicians operate and maintain equipment used to amplify, record and display sound and images of live events. According to Salary.com, the average Audio Visual Technician Salary is \$55,155 and the range of salaries typically falls between \$47,247 and \$65,176. Having an associate degree makes graduates more attractive to employers and helps their careers progress quicker due to the combination of strong technical skills and

workplace readiness skills they gain in college.

BFIT will use the funds to purchase tools and components typically used during AV system integration. Students will gain knowledge of electrical circuits, signals, and safety, audio and video cables and connectors typically found on the jobsite. With these real-world job aids, students will learn best practices for optimal system performance, proper documentation, and basic troubleshooting to be prepared for workplace challenges.

The grant is part of \$3.3 million in grants the administration announced it has awarded to 31 high schools and educational institutions to remove barriers to employment. Over the past three years, the administration has awarded \$52 million to 188 programs across the Commonwealth.

BFIT students graduate with practical experience in their field of study and other skills that are of immediate value in the workforce like teamwork, critical thinking, and professionalism. More than 90 percent of BFIT graduates either continue right into more advanced education or enter the workforce shortly after graduation in a variety of high-demand technical jobs in the region.

Monroe

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"blanketban." The policy's caveat is that it only targets some transgender individuals not all.

"The policy does allow transgender troops to serve but only if they do so in their biological sex, do not have a history or diagnosis of gender dysphoria, or can show a 36-month period of "stability" prior to military service."

Since the military policy "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) in 2011 allowed LGBTs to openly serve, unfortunately, military medical policies continue to discriminate against our transgender population. Evidence has shown that the military spends 5 times more on erectile dysfunction medications such as Viagra and Cialis, than it does providing medical services for transgender troops, the bias persists nonetheless. The President's binary views of gender, along with the perceived excessive cost of gender-reassignment surgery give rise to his notion that transgender healthcare is a "tremendous medical cost and disruption" to the military.

For example, in a July 2017 ad by the Family Research Council, for instance, Chelsea Manning is pictured next to a military jet with the question "Which one do you want our military to be spending your tax dollars on - transgender surgeries or equipment?"

In November 2017, the first sex reassignment surgery for an active service member was approved for payment. However, it must be emphasized that the medical cost for transgender troops is one-tenth of 1% of the military's annual medical spending.

Last year, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff testified before Congress on behalf of transgender troops serving openly because of

no known issues resulting from it.

Today, it is surprising to me that amid several wars that need every able person who wants to serve our transgender patriots would be excluded. Back in the day, LGBT service members who served our country were either closeted about their sexual orientation or gender identity, or they were discharged under "honorable conditions" called "Fraudulent Enlistment."

Military readiness is not a heterosexual cisgender calling. The President's ban reverts to the military's history of intolerance eerily reminiscent of the same argument used when the military did not want to integrate its ranks racially.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which bars discrimination in the workplace based on "race, color, religion, sex or national origin," but it does NOT bar discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the Obama administration expanded the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to protect LGBTQ Americans providing federal guidelines permitting transgender students to use "gender-appropriate facilities" which aligned with their gender identity. Obama's policy also opened the military to transgender service members

Transphobia, like racism and sexism, in our armed forces is militarily dangerous because it thwarts the necessary emotional bonding needed amongst service members in battle, and it underutilized the needed human resources to make a democratic and robust military.

Our transgender service members are prepared to defend this country with their lives. Without them, America would not be able to present itself as a united front on the battlefield. The real war in America is with itself.

Dog Lady

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paws so the dog can still be in touch with the ground but has a thin layer of rubbery protection blocking out the chemicals.

Some canine cognoscenti recommend using Vaseline or a substance called "Musher's wax" (used on sled dogs and available at some

specialty pet stores) to protect dogs' paws from the ice clumps that can build up in and around the paws and cause discomfort. If you use these petroleum-based products, remember to thoroughly wash off the dog's feet before letting your pet back into the house to avoid waxy paw prints all over the floor. It's a good idea anyway to wash off your dog's paws in tepid water and rub the dog down with a warm towel after outings in snow and ice.

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Blackstone

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created scores of posters and window murals to inspire students, cleared out space for more effective occupational and physical therapy sessions, improved shelving and storage in the school library, assembled care packages for students to be distributed before April's MCAS tests, organized the parent center and compassion closet for families, and added beauty and affirmations to the teacher lounge. Additional projects took place in SSYP's afterschool space at 419 Shawmut Avenue, including a re-organization of the library there.

The leadership workshop began with motivational words from the South End's new State Representative Jon Santiago and City

Councillor Ed Flynn. Both politicians talked about their commitment to public education. SSYP Staff Organizers Ariel Branz, Rafaela Polanco, and Bar Kolodny taught about the process that Boston Public Schools uses to distribute money to schools and the impossible choices that school administrators must often make. Using popular education techniques, games and team competition, pie charts and rock-paper-scissors, the trainers helped participants understand the complicated system of funding and expenses that schools like the Blackstone face. As one elementary student said at the end of the workshop, "It was really fun. The training was good for six-year olds and sixty-year olds!"

As the training outlined, due to changes in status and formulas, the Blackstone School

is facing a budget gap for the school year 2019-2020 and is eliminate \$500,000 of staff and services from its already thin budget. This will likely result in the elimination of at least ten staff positions, including the family coordinator, school counselor, inclusion strand coordinators, classroom teachers, and other key roles that help to meet the educational requirements of Blackstone's most high-need students.

Blackstone teachers and parents, community partners, and MLK Day volunteers refuse to accept choosing between meeting the needs of English Language Learners and Special Education students. Instead, leaders are working together to solve this educational

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(l-r) Blackstone Principal Iamel Adkins-Sharif, SSYP Parent Organizer Rafaela Polanco, City Councillor Ed Flynn, State Rep. Jon Santiago



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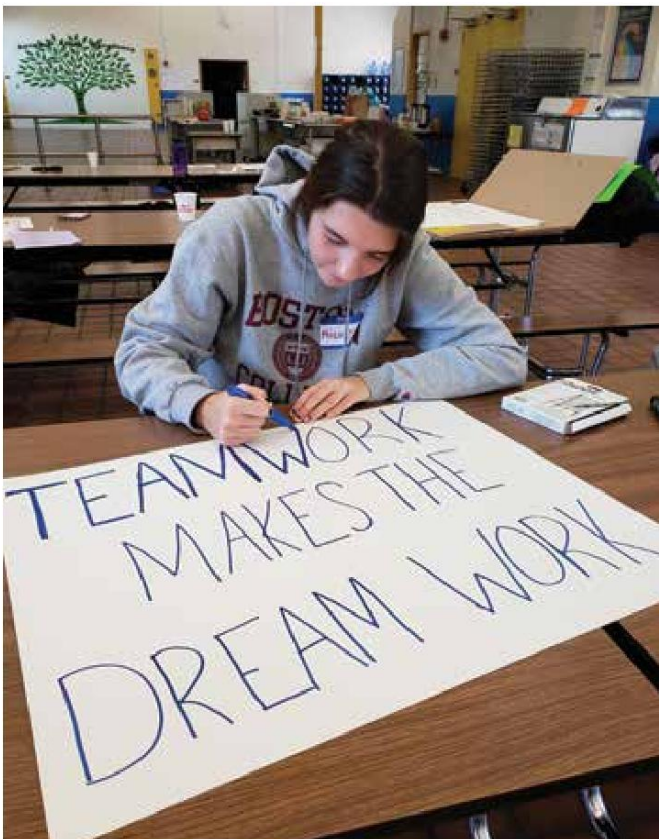
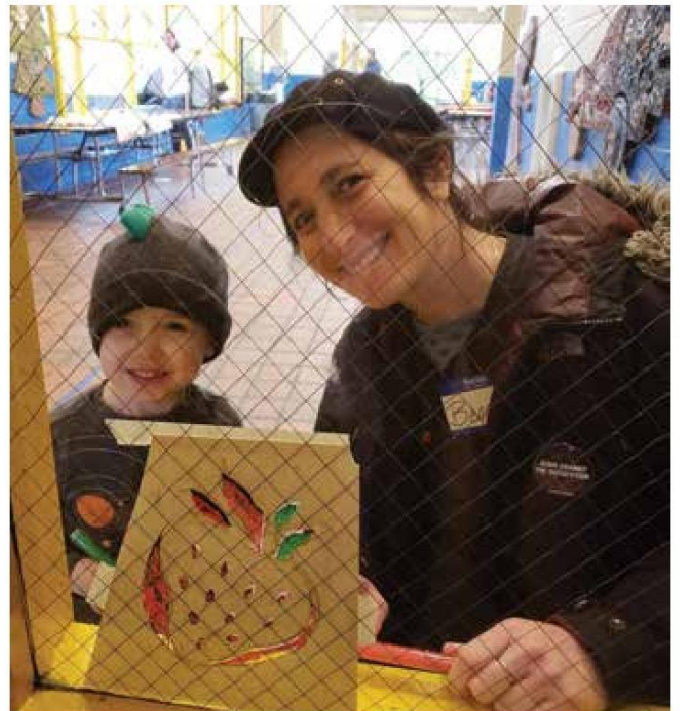
Blackstone

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emergency by pushing for the necessary, full-funding for the school. Participants in the leadership workshop made over 100 on-the-spot calls to Boston decision-makers in City Hall and the Boston Public Schools. Many of these leaders will be tuning out again, this time wearing their dark-blue Blackstone "Ubuntu" t-shirts for the Wednesday, January

30 School Committee meeting at 6:00pm at the Bolling Building, State Rep. Santiago and City Councillor Flynn pledged their support for this effort and will be at the School Committee Meeting, too.

Leaders from SSYP and the Blackstone School invite community members to support the Blackstone as their neighborhood school. To find out more about Blackstone's budget crisis, support teachers and families, or to volunteer in Blackstone classrooms and library, contact LizSteinhauser at liz@ssypboston.org.



(Top Left) Young volunteers assembled care packages for Blackstone students taking the MCAS test. (Top Right) Volunteers from Congregation Dorshei Tzedek bring beauty to the Blackstone School. (Bottom Left) Words to live by at the Blackstone School! (Bottom Right) Volunteers improve shelving in Blackstone Library



The people depicted here are models. Their image is being used for illustrative purposes only.

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