



For immediate release January 16, 2010
Contact: Kerry Birnbach
(212) 825-0028 ext. 212
kbirnbach@nyccah.org

400 New Yorkers Honor MLK in Citywide Serve-a-Thon and “Make it a Day On, Not a Day Off”

Supported by Martin Luther King III; Two More Days of Service in All Five Boroughs to Follow

Volunteers met at Riverside Church today to honor Dr. King and rally before they serve at food pantries and kitchens throughout the City. From today’s kickoff through Monday, 400 volunteers will assist over 30 soup kitchens and food pantries at various service sites. Council Member Dickens, Council Member Brewer and Donna Smith from the Corporation for National and Community Service rallied the volunteers at Riverside Church, a site where Dr. King previously delivered a speech, encouraging them to make long-term commitments to serve.

Dr. King was a firm believer in social justice, an ongoing theme throughout the Serve-a-Thon, which focused on the growing problem of hunger in New York City. Data from 2006-2008 show that one in ten families in New York State could not afford enough food, even before the recession. In New York City, over 1200 pantries and kitchens support over 1.4 million hungry New Yorkers. In terms of children, one out of every five New York City children lives in a household that cannot afford enough food.

In line with Dr. King’s message “everybody can be great because anyone can serve,” volunteers signed up for skills-based and long-term volunteering through NYCCAH’s innovative data match program at the event kick-off, and then volunteered at sites throughout the City. Pantries and kitchens are frequently volunteer-run, and need assistance with strategic planning, grant-writing, and technological skills.

The event was endorsed by Martin Luther King III, who noted that “Every year since 2004, the NYC Coalition Against Hunger has honored my father’s legacy by inspiring average citizens to serve. Because of your efforts, men and women from all walks of life commemorate my father’s birthday in New York’s food pantries and soup kitchens, providing much needed help for the city’s neediest citizens.”

As Dr. King famously said in his later years, “I’ve worked to get people the right to eat hamburgers and now I’ve got to do something to get them the money to buy them.” Volunteers helped with direct food service, assisted food programs with cleaning, maintenance, and other needs. Volunteers with a professional background learned about

using their skills on a long-term basis to help feeding agencies feed more people and move clients towards greater self-sufficiency.

Said Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger “We’re pleased to honor Dr. King today and throughout the weekend by bringing attention to the two things he cared most deeply about: social change and service. Today we’re encouraging volunteers to make long-term commitments to pantries and kitchens by helping with grant writing, website design, and other skilled tasks. Combining these commitments to service with strong government action that increases access to food stamps/SNAP benefits and expands access to healthy and affordable food, we can end hunger in this city.”

Said Senator Krueger "At the beginning of my career, I helped to start the NYC FoodBank and Chaired the Board of the NYC Coalition Against Hunger. Now, over 25 years later, I realize we were overly optimistic about the timeline to end hunger in America. But the lessons of Martin Luther King must not be forgotten. We must still fulfill the promises of the War on Poverty and the Great Society programs that Dr. King and so many others fought so hard to begin. This year, we must also re-dedicate ourselves to the teachings of Martin Luther King in the context of reaching out to help the people of Haiti during this terrible time for their nation. My support for the end of hunger and to live in a world of peace and social justice do not stop at our country's borders."

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH) represents the more than 1,200 nonprofit soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City and the more than one million low-income New Yorkers who are forced to use them. The Coalition works to meet the immediate food needs of low-income New Yorkers and enact innovative solutions to help them move "beyond the soup kitchen" to self-sufficiency.

###