ERDA is positively changing New York City public housing neighborhoods by providing residents with the tools and opportunities necessary for self-sufficiency and economic mobility.

Dear Friends,

ERDA’s mission is to transform and improve New York City public housing neighborhoods by providing residents with the tools and opportunities necessary for self-sufficiency and economic mobility. Through four integrated initiatives – Workforce Development, College Access, Financial Fitness, and Community Economic Development – ERDA works with community members to build pathways out of poverty. All ERDA programs are guided and supported by our Outreach Initiative, which employs residents of public housing as community organizers. Our Outreach Team both recruits for ERDA services and assesses community needs on an ongoing basis.

This past year has been one of incredible growth and accomplishments, in spite of the tough economic climate that disproportionately affects public housing residents.

In April, we opened the doors of the ERDA Federal Credit Union – the first credit union to be chartered in New York City in over a decade. Praised by Mayor Michael Bloomberg as a “major step forward” for Long Island City residents who have traditionally had to rely on expensive check-cashing services, the credit union has been a tremendous success in the six months since its founding. The ERDA FCU now boasts over 400 members, and we are offering innovative services such as free NYCHA rent payment and direct deposit for community members – all of which go towards revolutionizing the way public housing residents manage their money, build capital, and achieve their financial goals.

And in September, ERDA officially opened our Astoria Houses satellite office and with it, launched Financial Independence Today (FIT) – an innovative partnership with United Way NYC and the NYC Housing Authority. This new office allows us to reach a highly marginalized and isolated community in Western Queens – poverty, unemployment, high school drop-out, and crime, and virtually no direct access to goods and services such as subway service, a bank, or a supermarket. ERDA is working to change this paradigm and create pathways out of poverty through one-on-one financial counseling, workforce development, our college access program, and soon a branch of the ERDA Federal Credit Union.

The FIT initiative, aimed at increasing the financial stability of public housing residents who find themselves in rental arrears, allows ERDA to build on our experience and expertise helping community members of Western Queens reduce debt and build assets. The initiative launched at a crucial time: more than 1 in 10 households living in public housing owe at least one month in back rent, which represents a major increase from last year. Queens has been hit particularly hard: the number of residents owing back rent jumped nearly 70 percent in the last year. In the short time that the FIT initiative has been active, ERDA’s financial counselors have made great strides in helping public housing residents in rental arrears create budgets, manage their finances, and start getting back on track.

This past year, we also celebrated the high school graduation of our first seniors class of College Access Scholars and their matriculation into four-year colleges around the country. All of the College Access Scholars are the first in their families to attend college and all are from low-income families, making their success all the more profound.

We also helped an additional 150 low-income New Yorkers find good jobs, the majority with benefits. We launched an expanded comprehensive benefits counseling initiative, where all ERDA clients have access to all public benefits to which they are entitled. And we surpassed the $10 million mark in tax refunds returned to over 5,000 community members since the inception of our tax prep program, which connects low-income New Yorkers to the EITC and allows them to avoid predatory tax filing practices that are disproportionately marketed to low-income files.

As is true every year, all of ERDA’s successes and accomplishments could not have been achieved without the drive and dedication of the ERDA staff. Your expertise, truly impressive diligence, and steadfast dedication to helping the residents of Western Queens are crucial to ERDA’s ability to provide pathways out of poverty. I would also like to thank our committed, diverse, and generous funders – including our Board of Directors and newly established Advisory Board – for believing in ERDA and for providing valuable guidance in all of our endeavors.

I am so proud of all that ERDA has accomplished in this past year and over the past six years. Together, we have empowered public housing residents financially, in searching for and maintaining employment, in gaining an education, and in revitalizing our neighborhoods. The stories of community members that we share in this report illustrate the importance of ERDA’s work in public housing neighborhoods. I look forward to our continued partnerships with passionate community members, like-minded organizations, innovative local businesses, our strong and dedicated elected officials, and all of our visionary funders to provide public housing residents with the tools they need to change their lives and their communities. ERDA has a long future ahead of us, and we hope that you will continue to support us and our mission.

Warmest,

Bishop Mitchell G. Taylor
Founder & President, ERDA

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

East River Development Alliance

Bishop Mitchell G. Taylor
Founder and President
East River Development Alliance

East River Development Alliance
ERDA and the Communities We Serve

ERDA IS BASED IN FOUR PUBLIC HOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS IN WESTERN QUEENS:

- Queensbridge Houses
  - Leaseholders: 6,842
- Woodside Houses
  - Leaseholders: 3,136
- Astoria Houses
  - Leaseholders: 3,328
- Ravenswood Houses
  - Leaseholders: 4,469

We know that approximately 30,000 individuals actually live in these communities.

- Less than half of households have a worker.
- Less than 1 in 10 residents has a bachelor’s degree.
- Approximately 3 in 10 residents lack bank accounts.
- The majority of residents use check cashers and non-formal banking services.
- 7 in 10 black and latino boys do not graduate high school on time.
- The average household income is $21,000, perilously close to the federal poverty line and far below the NYC self-sufficiency standard, which measures what it actually takes to meet basic needs in New York.

The ERDA Response

Working closely with the existing networks in public housing communities, ERDA employs a holistic approach to neighborhood improvement and to increased resident access to opportunities.

This approach consists of four integrated initiatives that reach 4,000 residents per year.

**Community Economic Development:** organizing to ensure public housing neighborhoods have access to community assets such as mainstream retail services, including fresh food, banks, and a financial cooperative that empowers the community.

**Workforce Development:** job placement assistance for the unemployed and underemployed, with a focus on creating long-term career ladders.

**Financial Fitness:** crisis counseling on critical debt issues, long-term and short-term individualized financial counseling, financial education workshops, free tax preparation, and homeownership workshops.

**College Access:** a comprehensive initiative for youth, including school-based, weekend and afterschool activities such as college trips, SAT preparation, college counseling, career exploration, mentoring and college application assistance, and retention services and counseling for those in college.
My name is Johanna Flores. I am a single mother, the sole supporter of my children, and I attend LaGuardia College pursuing my Associate’s Degree in Business Management. Because of the additional support I give my parents, I built up thousands of dollars in credit card debt. Fortunately, ERDA came into my life.

My financial counselor helped me understand how to achieve effective debt management and the importance of spending my money wisely. She taught me so much, starting from the small, every day financial decisions to helping me think about my long-term goals.

I opened a traditional IRA account so that when it’s time, I will have the funds to enjoy my retirement and not have to depend on my children. All of these lessons from ERDA give me peace of mind and allow me to be productive at work and an attentive mother.

I now have a plan to pay off all my credit cards. For the first time in my life (and I may be the first in my family to do this), I have money in my savings account and I will continue saving, saving, and saving. I know it will take years, but my dream is to be completely debt free, so I can then buy my dream house!
My name is Angel Gonzalez, and I learned about ERDA’s Jobs to Build On (JTBO) program through a flyer I saw on a building door in Woodside Houses. From what I saw on the flyer I thought that it could help me and I was right. When I went down there I met an ERDA Training Specialist, who taught the workshop at the time. In the workshop we were taught how to speak in interviews, how to type up a resume, and also how to be prepared for anything that was affiliated with the work environment.

Soon after that I met other WFD counselors, who let me use the computers in their computer lab. At the same time they provided job sites and listings for the workshop class as well. The counselors gave each person one on one attention, which I thought was the best part of the workshop. After attending ERDA for a while, the ERDA Business Accounts manager came across a job that she thought would be good for me and also matched what was on my resume. The job was for the cable company RCN. ERDA got me the interview which went very well. I would also like to add that the second best part of the workshop is that the counselors get to know the job recruiters personally which I think is great on their part.

Thanks to her getting me the interview I have been working at RCN for the past year and three months. It started as a temp job, which turned into a permanent job. I work as a Warehouse Person and make $15.45 an hour. I am enjoying the work and the work environment.

In conclusion I would like to thank everyone that helped me and would recommend to anyone out of work to go there to seek help.
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
ERDA is creating public housing neighborhoods that are vibrant communities anchored with the basic goods and services that allow families to thrive. ERDA is working to ensure that residents living in public housing neighborhoods have access to fresh food, mainstream financial institutions, and local businesses that meet their needs.

Through the ERDA Merchant’s Association, we are directly working with small businesses to promote local economic growth. And in partnership with graduate students at NYU, we are conducting a food assessment of the deli and grocery stores of Long Island City and Astoria to evaluate what healthy and affordable food options are available in the community.

The ERDA Federal Credit Union
The ERDA Federal Credit Union offers affordable and relevant financial services including access to capital, asset building vehicles, and ownership stakes to its members. The credit union is located across from Queensbridge Houses, the largest public housing development in the country, and down the street from Ravenswood Houses.

The ERDA FCU serves as an economic anchor – helping ensure that as Long Island City continues to change, the growth benefits residents throughout the neighborhood by keeping neighborhood assets locally owned and controlled. Like all ERDA initiatives, the ERDA FCU is part of a comprehensive effort to promote self-sufficiency and economic mobility in public housing neighborhoods.

The ERDA FCU currently has over 400 members and $200,000 in assets. Over 2,000 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) rent payments have been made.

The following services are currently offered at the ERDA FCU:
Savings Accounts
Children’s Savings Accounts
Share certificates
Vacation Clubs
Direct Deposit
Corporate/Official Checks
Client Success

Shuave Jackson

“My name is Hollis Jackson Jr. and I am a parent and resident of Queensbridge houses. My daughter Shuave Jackson joined ERDA as a part of the ERDA Scholars program for incoming 11th graders and she has received SAT and college prep support. This program helped her tremendously. Because she attended the SAT program, she scored 200 points higher than when she first took the exam. Likewise, because she attended the Scholar’s program, we knew how to navigate the financial aid system. She is currently attending SUNY Oswego and she is receiving grants to cover her tuition, room and board at a reputable college.”

Truly, I am ecstatic and very grateful for the amount of time and effort ERDA has put in to assist me and my family. As a single father, I knew I was going to need assistance with financial aid. ERDA helped walk me through the complicated process. As residents in public housing, we must be proud of, participate in, and utilize our available community resources. I am an example that if you work your community networks and organizations, they’ll work for you. It is time for us to step up and help our families and our communities make our neighborhoods safe, healthy and places of opportunity for positive development.

Again, I’d like to express my utmost gratitude and appreciation for all of the support and service my family has received from ERDA and I encourage and recommend you to become involved in reaching any employment, educational, financial or community development goals that you may have.

COLLEGE ACCESS
ERDA has provided in-depth SAT, college preparation, and college retention services -- including one-on-one counseling about the FAFSA and financial aid for parents and students -- for more than 250 high school juniors and seniors since our inception. In 2010, we sent a cohort of 16 students to college -- these students are all the first in their families to go to college. High school juniors in 2010 increased their SAT scores by an average of 200 points. In our early awareness program, over 550 children ages 6-14 and their parents have attended college tours and information sessions at top colleges in the region. In addition, we have hosted a monthly career exploration program and financial education program for the entire fifth grade class at four local elementary schools since September 2005. In 2010, our new Savings Series reached 325 students at PS 76, PS 112, PS 111 and PS 171 -- a creative effort to provide banking education and accounts at the ERDA Federal Credit Union in local elementary schools.
ERDA Opens the ERDA Federal Credit Union – First Federal Credit Union Chartered in New York City in Over a Decade

ERDA Celebrates the Grand Opening of the ERDA Astoria Houses Office and the Launch of Financial Independence Today!

On April 26, 2010, the East River Development Alliance (ERDA) celebrated the opening of the ERDA Federal Credit Union (ERDA FCU) – the first credit union to be chartered in NYC in a decade, the first new credit union in Queens in thirty years, and the first federal credit union chartered under the Obama administration. In a neighborhood where 3 in 10 residents lack bank accounts, and the majority of residents use check-cashers for most of their financial transactions, the ERDA Federal Credit Union is revolutionizing the way public housing residents manage their money, build capital, and achieve their financial goals. It will embed a culture of ownership and savings in public housing neighborhoods in Western Queens and serve as a model for what is possible in public housing neighborhoods citywide, and throughout the nation. By the end of 2010, the ERDA FCU already had over 350 members and $100,000 in assets, and processed over 1,200 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) rental payments for free.

“ERDA is dedicated to making public housing developments places of great opportunity, places which house a positive vision of the future for the people who live here. The establishment of this financial cooperative, owned by residents, makes resident empowerment and ownership real,” said ERDA Founder and President Bishop Mitchell G. Taylor. “The opening of the ERDA FCU marks the next phase of ERDA’s work for change, and presents a model for every public housing neighborhood in New York City.”

Mayor Michael Bloomberg said, “Nearly 50,000 Queens households – many in public housing – don’t have bank accounts, and one of the major reasons is a lack of access to local credit unions. The East River Development Alliance is committed to helping public housing residents in Long Island City move up the economic ladder, and its new federal credit union is a major step forward.”

The opening of the ERDA FCU was covered in:

Crain’s New York Business, “Getting Some Credit Where It’s Due,” 5/2/2010
NY1, “New Credit Union to Open in Long Island City,” 4/27/2010

The launch of FIT and opening of ERDA Astoria was covered in:

WNYC, “Help for Public Housing Residents Who Are Behind on Their Rent,” 9/27/2010

Astoria Houses: A marginalized, underserved community. No bank. No supermarket. No subway stop. The poverty rate, the unemployment rate, and the high school drop-out rate are all higher than the New York City average.

On September 27, 2010, in collaboration with United Way of NYC (UWNYC) and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), ERDA launched a new initiative, Financial Independence Today (FIT), and celebrated the grand opening of ERDA’s Astoria Houses office with the support New York City Council Member Peter Vallone, Jr. FIT is an innovative public/private partnership between UWNYC and ERDA – run in collaboration with NYCHA – aimed at increasing the financial stability of public housing residents who find themselves in rental arrears.

FIT is a two year demonstration project operating in six housing developments in Western Queens: Astoria, Baisley Park, Pinomisk, Queensbridge, Ravenswood, and Woodside. Residents can access ERDA’s financial counseling and education services, ranging from short-term financial crisis counseling and financial education workshops, to longer-term one-on-one financial counseling focused on asset building. FIT plans to provide money management services to at least 2,000 households over two years.
Acknowledging the importance of neighbor-to-neighbor networking and the unique knowledge possessed by residents of public housing, ERDA’s Outreach Team – all of whom are residents of public housing in Western Queens – provide door-to-door outreach for ERDA programs and conduct an ongoing community needs assessment. In the last 12 months, the ERDA Outreach Team has achieved the following:


Over 8,500 doors knocked
Provided 678 ERDA program referrals to 580 households
Initiated 455 ERDA program intakes

In Fall 2010, the Outreach Team worked hard to recruit over 200 people for ERDA’s 3rd Annual Job Fair which was held on October 7th. In addition, they have hit the pavement to recruit for ERDA programs through the following outreach initiatives:

Door-to-door surveys to gauge community awareness of the ERDA Federal Credit Union’s services; in partnership with NYCHA, targeted outreach to recruit 11th graders for ERDA’s College Access Program; and tabling at the Floating Hospital and Community Healthcare Network to provide patients with general information regarding ERDA services.

ERDA Outreach Team

ERDA Outreach Team

ERDA is confident that these on-the-ground navigators have been instrumental in raising awareness about ERDA’s vital programs, and the Outreach Team agrees. “Working for ERDA as a part of the Outreach team is exciting because we immediately see the results of our work,” Peter Rozario said. “When people sign up for programs it’s often because they learned about it from fliers that we distributed or because we spoke with them directly.” Jessica Clark adds, “Don’t let our enthusiasm fool you—outreach is hard work!”

The ERDA Public Benefits and Tenant Advocacy Initiative was launched in January 2010 to provide direct access for ERDA clients to public benefits such as Food Stamps, Earned Income Disregard (EID), public health insurance, child care, tax incentives such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), SSI, SSD, veterans benefits, and advocacy related to public housing – including repairs, language access, and rental payment adjustments. These interventions empower public housing and other low-income residents of Western Queens to maximize their income while removing disincentives to work, enable optimal performance in all ERDA programs, and allow clients to meet their own personal goals.

Public Benefits Counselors screen clients for a host of benefits and provide thorough screenings for food stamps, connecting the client immediately to an appointment at ERDA’s Paperless Office System (POS) site, administered by ERDA, Food Bank for NYC and the NYC Coalition Against Hunger, to complete an application. Food Stamps Recertification appointments are also available through the POS site.

ERDA’s Paperless Office System (POS) site, administered by ERDA, Food Bank for NYC and the NYC Coalition Against Hunger, to complete an application. Food Stamps Recertification appointments are also available through the POS site.

Public Benefits Counselors also provide thorough screening for public medical care programs such as Medicare, Family Health Plus and Child Health Plus and provides appointments for a facilitated enrollment to complete the application through our partnership with a local organization.

ERDA’s Comprehensive Public Benefits and Tenant Advocacy Initiative

One of our Financial Fitness counselors met with Sara (name changed) back in November. She had fallen behind on her rent and had damages in her apartment that NYCHA was slow to respond to. Because of the pending repairs, she had been holding on to her rent for several months, keeping the money in cash. But the money disappeared; she believed someone stole it out of her apartment. Sara started working with her counselor to make a plan for rent payment and even though in December she fell ill and she couldn’t attend meetings with the counselor in person, they still held meetings by phone and the counselor was able to prepare her for her pending court hearing. Sara knew to ask for an “Order To Show Cause” at court and her counselor also put together a letter of support for her. In the meantime, they continued to work on gathering the paperwork for HRA’s “One Shot Deal”. By January, Sara was able to file her taxes and get a refund, with which she was able to pay part of her back rent. She is now also ready to present her case to HRA to apply for a One Shot Deal and hopefully finish paying the remaining balance of her back rent. Sara has also started working with our Tenant Advocate, who ensured that the repairs on Sara’s apartment were completed.
Funds Secured in 2010

*Please note that this list does not match the FY10 audit, which represents July 2009-June 2010 actual funds received (not just secured).

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- Individual

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MAKING POSITIVE CHANGE

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