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Neighbors Clean Up the Streets

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There's a lot that residents can do when they come together and organize—but hauling junked cars out of vacant lots isn't one of them, and neither is installing speed bumps, fixing broken street lights, or repairing hazardous playground equipment. Residents know the problems, but connecting with the right City department



can stymie even the most dedicated.

That's why in 2009, The Trust made a **\$100,000** grant to the **Citizens' Committee for New York City's Love your (NYC) Block** program. Through the program, Mayor Bloomberg and the Citizens' Committee supported 60 volunteer-led neighborhood groups. With very small grants and planning assistance, the groups chose their projects for physically transforming their blocks. The program had 2,140 volunteers who put in 17,120 hours of work. Some of the more successful projects even got media attention.

Assisted by City departments, the groups got vacant lots cleaned up, sidewalks and streetlamps repaired, graffiti removed, and wood chips and gardening tools supplied, to name a few accomplishments. "This will help build long-lasting working relationships between community groups and the Departments of Parks and Recreation, Sanitation, and other City agencies," said Peter Kostmayer, president of Citizens' Committee.

The Trust has been funding the Citizens' Committee for New York City since the late 1970s, helping it foster community throughout the five boroughs. Kostmayer continues, "You get people in a housing project or on a block that have never met and bring them together through a garden project or mural painting; it's a wonderful way to keep our neighborhoods a good places to live." One example is Holistic Hood, which received \$1,800 from the Citizens' Committee to organize free healthy—lifestyle workshops for women of color in the South Bronx, including a weekly yoga class. Women also used these events to share stories, build relationships and community, and get involved in other local projects.

Some of the City agencies that participated in the program experienced a few logistical challenges coordinating and delivering services. During the pilot program, only 12 groups participated, but that number jumped to 60 once the actual program began. In order to compensate for these capacity issues, the Committee is planning to continue the program with a reduced number of groups, a modified range of services and improved communication with City agencies.

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909 Third Avenue | New York, NY 10022 | P (212) 686-0010 | F (212) 532-8528 | aw@nyct-cfi.org

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