



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 1/27/20

Contacts: Meena Alagappan, 212-744-2504, meena@teachheart.org

Jonah Allon, 929-291-8881, jonah.allon@brooklynbp.nyc.gov

Borough President Adams Partners with HEART to Bring Compassionate Communities Program Promoting Animal Welfare to Brooklyn Schools

Brooklyn, NY - Today, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers (HEART) announced their partnership on the *Compassionate Communities Award* competition for the 2019-2020 school year. The Brooklyn Borough President reaffirmed his commitment to animal welfare initiatives, partnering with HEART on this innovative approach to nurturing the whole child in our schools and connecting our schools to the needs of the wider community.

HEART is a non-profit public charity based in NYC that is dedicated to fostering a more compassionate and sustainable world through education. The *Compassionate Communities Award* competition will be offered this year to fifteen elementary schools in Districts 15 and 16 in Brooklyn, and will reach over 9,625 students. HEART is offering 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes of \$6,000, \$2,500, and \$1,500, respectively, to the contest winners as a way of supporting their efforts to inspire a generation of compassionate change-makers and enhance positive school community engagement.

“Animal welfare initiatives are central to our mission at Borough Hall. I have always believed we share fundamental values with nonhuman animals, dating back to my days in the state Senate, when I led a march against the City-funded slaughter of geese in Prospect Park, and was influential in forcing many circus groups to eliminate the use of wild animals in their acts,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Adams**. “As Brooklyn borough president, I have continued that advocacy by regularly holding animal rescue training events and supporting a bill that granted a tax credit to individuals who adopt pets. And of course, we continue to push for plant-based initiatives such as Meatless Monday in schools and other City facilities, along with our Bellevue Hospital Plant-Based Lifestyle Medicine Program. I am proud to be partnering with HEART on this important initiative.”

“We’re delighted and honored to partner with the Brooklyn Borough President’s office on this Compassionate Communities contest, supporting schools in their efforts to foster students’ compassion and respect toward animals, people, and the environment. Through sharing humane education resources and practices with the participating schools, we’re already seeing them implement innovative and exciting programs that are inspiring empathy and positive social action in our youth,” said **Meena Alagappan, Executive Director of HEART.**

The 2019-2020 *Compassionate Communities Award* competition is challenging these schools to expand their social-emotional learning practices to encompass connections to the animals that we share the world with, and to the natural environment that sustains us all. As students practice mindfulness, build positive social skills, and explore ethical issues through critical thinking, they will consider how their own emotional lives compare to those of other animals, and how their actions affect not only the other people in their lives, but also the animals and the living natural world around them. HEART staff will work closely with each school to provide support for developing and implementing program enhancements that promote a school-wide culture of empathy, stewardship, and compassionate action through in-school learning experiences and community-based service projects.

Some of the ideas already being developed include: partnering with a local animal shelter to encourage adoptions and spread awareness about the causes of companion animal homelessness; expanding school gardening to promote greater access in the community to healthy, whole foods and provide critical natural space for local birds and pollinators; expanding an exciting partnership with city groups working to re-establish oysters in New York Harbor and surrounding marine habitats; connecting an existing Comfort Dog program to service activities in support of high-needs rescued animals; and infusing humane lessons and activities into everyday classroom experience through use of a circle-time curriculum that aligns these with core restorative and social-emotional practices.

At the end of the year, each school will submit a multi-media presentation highlighting their *Compassionate Communities* activities, projects, and accomplishments. Finalist schools will participate in a celebration and awards ceremony at Brooklyn Borough Hall in June of 2020, where an esteemed panel of educational, legislative, and community leaders will serve as judges in selecting the winner. Borough President Eric Adams will present the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes to the schools. These funds will be used to initiate or expand a project of the school's choice that aligns with their goals within the award competition and addresses meaningful needs within their wider community.

Following the very successful earlier contests in the Bronx and on Long Island, HEART is thrilled to partner with the Brooklyn Borough President’s office to add Brooklyn schools to a growing list of compassionate communities.