SESAME FLYERS CULTURAL DEPARTMENT LOSES DEPT. OF CULTURAL AFFAIR FUNDING

Sesame Flyers Youth Steel Orchestra and SFI Cultural Dance Company, which makes up our Cultural Department, for the past four years have been able to leverages free classes at our Winthrop Beacon in East Flatbush, our Bildersee Beacon in Canarsie and our Cultural Center on Church Avenue, thru funding from NYC Dept of Youth and Community Development and NYC Dept of Cultural Affairs. Well not any more. A quarter of its funding from DYCD and all of its funding from DCA has been lost as of July 1st 2012.

Unfortunately, while we knew that the DYCD funding was being decreased, we did not learn of the elimination of DCA funding until September; well after most of the expenses for our Steel Orchestra’s annual Panorama performance was already committed. Sesame Flyers applied for continued funding under DCA’s Request for Proposals (RFP) process for 2012 back in March of this year, with funding scheduled to begin July 1st 2012. DCA announced its RFP’s results late, due to its struggle to reduce its budget and the amount of cultural arts organization it funds this year. Our funding from DCA was not renewed.

Sesame Flyers Youth Steel Orchestra, led by Freddie Harris III, a well-known panist, arranger and instructor, enters the annual Panorama competition Hosted by the West Indian American Day Carnival Association (WIADCA) for the past eight years. This year the band, consisting of eighty-one players, placed 6th out of 12 bands who entered the competition.

SFI Cultural Dance Company, led by husband and wife team of Gene and Rosana Toney, has over 30 years experience in dance, drum and costume design. The Tony’s choreographed and trained the youth dancers and produced the costumes that propelled Sesame Flyers to re- take first place in the annual
Kiddies Carnival Large band of the year competition hosted by WIADCA on Labor Day Saturday. Over four hundred kids and their parents participated in our Kiddies’ band this year, while over 50 kids perform during year round events. The added benefit of this husband and wife team modeling positive family relationships is an asset to youth who learn year round, positive body image, fitness, nutrition and self-esteem in addition to the respect for other cultures and competency as dancers.

The Steel Orchestra, and the SFI Dance Company, acts as the ambassadors of Sesame Flyers to the New York City community, sharing the unique range of these instruments and cultural dance repertoire with many. During the year, the Orchestra and the dance company, rehearses, and learns new material to perform for its audiences across the City. Dance and Steelpan classes are offered from October to May as part of the Saturday Performing Arts program and our after school program at our four community center locations, strengthening the capacity for achievement. SFI Cultural Dance Company participants learn Caribbean, African and South American dance and present two public performances. Youth Steel Orchestra participants learn to play an instrument, receive an introduction to a variety of musical genres, and present two public performances.

The year round cultural program classes provided 150 youth with cultural arts activities in dance, drama and steelpan. The proposed program to DCA, and the activities provided by DYCD would have helped students explore creative expression through exposure to culturally sensitive art forms, nurtured the children's creativity and fostered an interest in art. We must find a way to continue this programming despite the loss in funding, our children deserve it.