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Former High School Dropouts Rebuild a Home and Rebuild Their Lives in the Process

PHILADELPHIA, June 20, 2007 – More than 200 people gathered this morning to celebrate the dedication of a newly rehabilitated home at 3018 North 26th St. during a ribbon cutting ceremony sponsored by YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School and Resources for Human Development (RHD). Funding support for the project was provided by the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD).

The dedication marks a year of hard work and accomplishments for YouthBuild's students, all of whom are former high school dropouts. As part of YouthBuild's high school diploma and vocational training program, students were contracted to rehabilitate the home by RHD, a diversified non-profit social service organization. Affordable Housing Program, a division of RHD, has redeveloped and sold the home as part of its program to provide affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families.

"The vacant property has been transformed into a beautiful home that someone will love, cherish and fill with memories for the rest of their life," said Eric Bischoff, project manager for Affordable Housing Program.

"This is a great achievement for our students and for the community," said Simran Sidhu, YouthBuild's executive director. "Our students have worked hard all year long to make this house possible. We are very proud of what they have done in their lives and in the house."

Roughly thirty YouthBuild students engaged in full-gut rehabilitation over ten months – led by Construction Instructor George Jenkins, an eight year YouthBuild veteran with 20 years of construction experience. The students took the home through every phase of reconstruction including demolition, foundation, framing, drywall, painting and finishing work. "I think it is an exceptional accomplishment for the students to complete the rehabilitation of the property from start to finish," said Jenkins. "With this project, they have breathed new life into the community and taken control of their own destinies."

Sidhu opened the dedication with a greeting sent by Judge Marjorie O. Rendell, First Lady of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Rendell acknowledged the students' accomplishments to themselves and the community. "Your selfless acts of kindness are an inspiration not only to those guiding you, but to the surrounding community as well," she wrote. "The perseverance

you have demonstrated amidst grave obstacles and trying endeavors is truly exemplary... You are to be commended for your dedication to citizen service and effective leadership.”

Speakers for the event included: Director Joseph Certaine of the Governor’s Office, Southeast Region; RHD Project Manager Eric Bischoff; YouthBuild Philadelphia Director of Construction and Business Development Don Pinkney; new home owner Fay Jones; YouthBuild Philadelphia construction student Charnaee Lee; YouthBuild Philadelphia Youth Congress representative Domonique Williams; YouthBuild Philadelphia Founder Taylor Frome; and, mayoral candidate Michael Nutter.

During the ceremony, new home owner Fay Jones thanked the students for their hard work. When asked earlier about how Jones felt about their contributions to her life, she stated, “I’m really proud of the kids who built the house. It seems like they’ve all been through a lot.”

Jones is the single mother of two children, Michael Faulkner, 13, and Fay Ross, 3. Jones balanced motherhood, two jobs and the beginnings of her new catering service in order to make this new home a reality for herself and her family. “This is a big accomplishment for me and my kids,” she stated. “It gave me a positive outlook on things.”

Michael and young Fay smiled proudly as they helped to cut the ribbon covering the door of their new family home. Both received laptops during the ceremony from YouthBuild’s technology refurbishing program.

In the closing speech of the ceremony, candidate Nutter urged the students of YouthBuild to take the lessons and skills they have learned, and give back to the community and the world.

Charnaee Lee, 21, plans to do just that as she graduates and transitions to college and a career. When asked what she enjoyed most about her time on the construction site and at YouthBuild, Lee’s answer was simple – helping others. She stated, “The simple fact of me helping somebody – that made me want to do it more.”

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YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School is a not-for-profit organization that provides out-of-school youth in Philadelphia the broadest range of tools, supports and opportunities available to become self-sufficient, responsible and productive citizens. YouthBuild Philadelphia offers an innovative 10-month program, which blends a rigorous academic curriculum with valuable community service experience and on-the-job training in construction, technology or nursing.

Students at YouthBuild Philadelphia can earn their high school diplomas and make successful transitions to full-time jobs, post-secondary educations, or further service with AmeriCorps. For more information, visit www.youthbuildphilly.org.

Resources for Human Development provides caring, effective, efficient, and innovative services that support people in building better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities.