



...Because every child deserves a childhood

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Head Start's Empty Seats Symbolize Devastating Impacts of Sequester Budget Cuts

Empty Seats = Lost Opportunities: 86 children lose services at Astor sites

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RHINEBECK – On **Monday, September 9, 2013 at 2:00 PM**, Astor's six Head Start Programs will display empty seats outside their buildings to represent the 118 slots that were cut in their Head Start and Early Head Start Programs in Dutchess County due to budget cuts forced by Congressional inaction.

The main event will take place at the Head Start Center at **50 Delafield Street, Poughkeepsie**. Parents, legislators, staff and volunteers will be on hand to take part in this effort to call attention to the tens of thousands of children who have been cut from Head Start and Early Head Start Programs nationwide due to sequestration.

Head Start and Early Head Start are federal early childhood programs for low income families. Federal cuts mandated by last spring's congressional budget deadlock are affecting thousands of families nationwide. The congressional sequestration cuts resulted in extreme budget cuts in these programs around the United States. A total of \$405 million dollars has been cut and 3,847 children were forced to leave Head Start and Early Head Start Programs this year because of loss of monetary support.

According to Mary Sontheimer, Assistant Executive Director, Astor's Early Childhood Programs, "In Dutchess County, this cut resulted in a \$340,000 reduction in funding, which means that 86 youngsters in the county will no longer be receiving services at our Head Start and Early Head Start Centers. Funding remains for only 563 children. We also lost 22 positions." Sontheimer goes on to say that "the cuts came when a deadline for adopting the federal budget passed last April, triggering so-called 'sequester' reductions for various federal programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start."

"Our program sustained what is essentially a nine percent cut because of how our budget year falls," Sontheimer said. "We had to reduce expenses for an entire year in less than six months." All of Astor's Centers – located in Poughkeepsie, Wappingers Falls, Millerton, Red Hook, Beacon, Wingdale and Pine Plains – were affected. We want to send the message out that these budget cuts

are affecting our most vulnerable families. The pre-school years are critical to future academic success.”

Head Start provides education and services in literacy, math and social skills as well as nutrition and health. Pawling resident Mary Ann Ashby’s 4-year-old daughter, Adonyia Robinson, was one of a dozen children who could no longer attend the Head Start Program in Wingdale when the cuts went into effect. Ms. Ashby said the loss was devastating to her and her daughter.

“Adonyia cried and told me how much she missed her teachers and the other children,” Ms. Ashby said. “I definitely think she was learning a lot – she was really being prepared to go to Kindergarten.”

For more information about the Sept. 9th “empty chairs” event or Astor’s Head Start and Early Head Start Programs, contact Sonia Barnes-Moorhead at 845-871-1117 or smoorhead@astorservices.org. You are also welcome to visit the agency’s website at www.astorservices.org.

About Astor

Since 1953, Astor Services for Children & Families (formerly The Astor Home for Children) has been providing behavioral and educational services in a caring environment where children and their families find strength, healing, hope and trust. Now serving more than 6,000 children and families annually, Astor’s current range of services to families in the Mid-Hudson Valley and the Bronx include: residential treatment, therapeutic foster family care, early childhood programs, and community-based behavioral health and prevention services.

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