



...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 displayed empty seats outside their buildings to represent the 86 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 took place at the Head Start Center at **50 Delafield Street, Poughkeepsie**. Parents, legislators (State Senator Terry Gipson and Assemblyman Frank Skartados), staff, community partners and volunteers were 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 monetary loss 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 this reduction..

According to Mary Sontheimer, Assistant Executive Director, Astor's Early Childhood Programs, "In Dutchess County, this loss 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 staff 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."

During the event, three parents spoke of the impact the cuts have had on them. One family said their child can no longer attend because transportation was cut from the budget and they do not have a car to transport their child. This will further impact this family because they counted on the two meals per day their child received. In addition, both State Senator Gipson and Assemblyman Skartados offered their support during their presentations.

“Our program sustained what is essentially a 9% 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.”

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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