

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Lower Eastside Girls Club Launches its Center for Wellbeing and Happiness with Virtual Programming & Events



Carlina Rivera, Helen Rosenthal, Vanessa Gibson speak at the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness Launch 10.9.20

The Kick-Off Weekend's Programming Honored World Mental Health Day and International Day of the Girl

New York, New York- October 9, 2020- On Friday, October 9th, the Lower Eastside Girls Club (LESGC) commemorated the launch of its series of virtual wellness events for its new Center for Wellbeing and Happiness (CWBH). The 5,000 square-foot space (adjacent to its existing 35,000 square-foot facility) will provide intergenerational and holistic wellness programming for all community members, at no cost, allowing the LESGC to expand their facility, core mission, and service population when it opens in 2021. The virtual CWBH will open to the community in November 2020, providing interactive, accessible and trauma-informed web-based programming for all community residents, including classes in yoga, movement and mindfulness, stress reduction, nutrition and culinary education, and access to counseling and family support services.

The celebratory event included remarks from local city officials, Lower Eastside Girls Club staff, and partners as the organization unveiled the Center's new storefront designs, announced their virtual programming plans, and ushered in a weekend full of events to serve as a preview of what's to come. This includes a Healthy Bodies & Healthy Minds series on October 10th in honor of World Mental Health Day featuring Latham Thomas, Rosario Dawson, a Maybelline-led panel on mental health with a special appearance from I Weigh Founder, Jameela Jamil, an Impossible Foods cooking demo, and a Nike-led fitness class. On October 11th, the CWBH will host a Virtual Book Talk with Paola Mendoza and Abby

Sher (authors of *Sanctuary*) and a virtual screening of Intention Media’s documentary, *SURGE*, for International Day of the Girl.

“We recognized—and research confirms—that the health, wellbeing and success of the young women we support is deeply and intimately connected to the health, wellbeing and success of her family, her community and her world,” said Ebonie Simpson and Jenny Dembrow, Lower Eastside Girls Club Co-Executive Directors. “Today marks a significant milestone in our ability to expand both our service population and our mission to ensure not only our girls, but the entire community, all genders, all sexualities and all ages, have the tools and resources to be collectively and individually well.”

“Working with the Lower Eastside Girls Club as a 3rd generation LES woman has been the most fulfilling project of my career to strengthen the intrinsic quality fabric of the city,” shared Robyn Squires, Owner’s Representative (Rep) for the Design & Construction Coordination, Lower Eastside Girls Club. Squires is the founder of RYSQ, a wellbeing and sustainability driven design collective that synthesizes art and architecture. She joined the LESGC CWBH team in 2018 as Owner’s Representative for the design and construction of this expansion project. This is an extension of her initial project management role while working for the contractor for the original LESGC building in 2010-2012.

For the event, the Lower Eastside Girls Club staff and Board of Directors were joined by Gale Brewer, Borough President of the New York City borough of Manhattan, Carlina Rivera, Councilwoman for New York City Council District 2, Harvey Epstein, New York State Assembly Member, Brad Hoylman, New York State Senator, Helen Rosenthal, New York City Council Member, Vanessa Gibson, Bronx Council Member, Danei Cesario and Grete Grubelich of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and Helen Searle and Kelsey Habla of Arup.



Lower Eastside Girls Club Center for Wellbeing and Happiness, Sound Studio (Rendering, Credit Skidmore, Owings & Merrill)



"I want to congratulate the Lower Eastside Girls Club on the opening of its new Center for Wellbeing and Happiness and for the virtual event series they will be providing for our community in this trying time," said Councilwoman Carlina Rivera. "As a lifelong resident of the Lower East Side, I know how critical it is that we address mental health and wellness in our community, which is why I worked to secure \$3 million for this innovative project. Now, as we work to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must address the trauma and strain on our mental and physical health that we've all been struggling with as we continue to socially distance. The Center for Wellbeing and Happiness can be an anchor for our Lower East Side community to begin addressing these challenges, which too often disproportionately affect our low-income New Yorkers and communities of color. I look forward to working further with the Girls Club on this pioneering effort."

"I am proud to have supported the Lower Eastside Girls Club's expansion of its programming through its new physical space, the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness," said Manhattan Borough President, Gale A. Brewer. "The LESGC's intergenerational and holistic wellness programming, including counseling and family support services, housed in this brand-new facility, comes at a critical time for our borough as we face an unprecedented pandemic and public health crisis. I can think of no better way to honor World Mental Health Day and the International Day of the Girl than through the launching of the Healthy Bodies & Healthy Minds series."

When fully opened in 2021, the CWBH will serve as a wellness hub providing the space and opportunity for local organizations, expert practitioners, health-based city agencies and institutions, and their talented and resourced-filled community members, to connect, collaborate and serve, strategically addressing the wellbeing and health disparities in the Lower East Side. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated low-income minority communities throughout New York City. The LES, with its dense concentration of NYCHA housing and immigrant population, is no exception. The CWBH will offer wellbeing practices and services in a non-medicalized community setting, taking a holistic and wrap-around approach to address the immediate public health challenges related to COVID-19, including non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease and asthma; as well as community and family trauma, mental and emotional health, physical health, and nutrition.

"The opening of the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness is great news for our community in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The East Side needs resources like this now more than ever," said Harvey Epstein, New York State Assembly Member. He added, "The Center for Wellbeing and Happiness will offer free comprehensive and holistic care to our neighbors. I am thankful for the Lower Eastside Girls Club for their continued support for our community and I look forward to the work that will be done."



Lower Eastside Girls Club Center for Wellbeing and Happiness, Happiness Hall (Rendering, Credit Skidmore, Owings & Merrill)

Programming will be informed by an understanding of the full spectrum of the social determinants of health: race, ethnicity, immigrant status, socioeconomic background, education, physical environment, employment, access to healthy food, social capital, as well as affordable health care. These programs will be offered six days a week, at no cost, with monthly offerings as well. Community members will be able to pre-register for sessions or workshops, as well as drop in for community events and programs.

“Shearman & Sterling is proud to have represented the Lower Eastside Girls Club in its acquisition and financing of a commercial condominium unit, which will house the new Center for Wellbeing and Happiness,” said Shearman & Sterling associate Zachary Aries. “We value our long-standing partnership with the Girls Club and look forward to continuing to work with this outstanding community organization for years to come,” added partner Lisa Brill, who is the firm’s Americas Regional Managing Partner.

The Center is generously supported by the Kate Spade New York Foundation, with special programming provided by Maybelline. The CWBH was developed in partnership with a women-led team from global architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, global consulting, engineering and design firm Arup, and mechanical engineering firm, JB&B.

“We are honored to join the Lower Eastside Girls Club in celebrating the opening of the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness,” said SOM Architectural Professional and Senior Designer of the CWBH, Grete Grubelich. “We designed an adaptable space that will accommodate an expansion of the LESGC’s programming, and support the LESGC’s invaluable work in empowering the lives of young women and members of the Lower East Side community.”



Lower Eastside Girls Club Center for Wellbeing and Happiness, Mind and Body Center (Rendering, Credit Skidmore, Owings & Merrill)

“Arup is delighted to partner with SOM to provide pro bono acoustic and audiovisual design services for the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness,” said Helen Searle, Senior Consultant, Arup. She added, “The high caliber creative output from the Girls Club is a great inspiration for us in the design of this state of the art facility. We feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to work alongside a team of female architects and engineers on a Center that will empower and support the female leaders of the future.”

“Being part of a community-based design project promoting advocacy and leadership for girls and young women is a partnership our predominantly all-woman engineering team is particularly proud to have contributed to, and is an apt demonstration of how pro bono work positively impacts both those serving as well as those served,” said Scott E. Frank, Managing Partner, JB&B

The Center for Wellbeing and Happiness will create racial and social equity for the LES community by increasing access to quality wellbeing resources and tools. For more information, please visit:
<https://www.girlsclub.org/center-for-wellbeing-and-happiness/>

Link to CWBH Press Conference Images (Credit- Lower Eastside Girls Club):

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/o1q1t4j08fnsoip/AABY6TvVVRj7JiKJDFytZOXYa?dl=0>

Press Conference Video & Schedule of Events: <https://centerforwellbeing.nyc>

Renderings of the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness (Credit- Skidmore, Owings & Merrill):

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lepwyk3poorylon/AADMqxMGSFDar0zsjAY68B7fa?dl=0>



About the Lower Eastside Girls Club

The Lower Eastside Girls Club (LESGC) is a community-based organization dedicated to preparing today's girls for tomorrow's world. LESGC's mission is "to raise the next generation of environmental, entrepreneurial and ethical leaders." LESGC connects girls and young women to healthy and successful futures. We offer them "Joy. Power. Possibility," so they know that they can do anything.

Founded in 1996 by neighborhood mothers, entrepreneurs, artists, and community activists to address the lack of services and facilities for girls in our community, we now serve hundreds of girls and young women aged 10-23, along with their families and community. In over 20 years, we have grown from a small volunteer-led organization into a recognized leader and innovator in the field of youth programming, community arts and community engagement, with citywide, national and global partnerships. The girls and young women in our program are using their voices and talents to create movements, demonstrations, art, music, and products that promote racial and gender justice, barrier and ceiling dismantling, anti-violence, mental and physical wellness, environmental justice, civic and political engagement. We are committed to providing our girls and their community with the tools and experiences they need to overcome and eradicate the barriers that may limit their potential, uplift their communities, and promote systemic equity.

Our 35,000 square foot Center for Community provides over 50 unique classes a week, all free of charge. Facilities include a Maker Shop for engineering and coding; Biology lab for STEM programming focused on earth and ocean research; Alphabet City Art School for visual arts and crafts; Center for Media and Social Justice for digital media and photography; Sound Studio for music production and our radio station/podcast, WGRL (Where Girl Radio Lives); Design Shop for fashion design; a rooftop farm; full culinary kitchen and cafe; and 64-seat state-of the art, 30-foot dome planetarium. In 2021, LESGC will open the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness, an intergenerational and holistic wellness education and training center for all community members.

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