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LEED Gold Certification a First for New York City Group Home

(Brooklyn, NY)—In a continuing effort to meet the needs of the community, HeartShare Human Services of New York recently opened two new residential programs for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders that are the first such facilities in New York City to earn Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. One residence is for seven girls and the other is for seven boys, ages 8 through 21. Early in the process, HeartShare administrators were committed to a project that was as environmentally conscious as possible and could meet the many requirements for achieving LEED for Homes Gold certification.

LEED certification provides independent, third-party verification that a building, home or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at achieving high performance in key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality. The structure HeartShare chose for the project was a former convent located at 131 Bay 19th Street, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn that was built in 1964 and owned by St. Finbar's Church. The project involved a gut renovation of the building and its reconfiguration as a two-family residence. The building is conveniently located next door to The HeartShare School, where the children attend school on a daily basis.

There were many special efforts undertaken to achieve LEED for Homes Gold certification for the project. During renovation, numerous “green building” practices and energy-saving features were used to make the project a sustainable one that reduced the overall environmental footprint. These included:

- Sorting and recycling demolition and construction waste to reduce the amount of material going into landfills
- Using low-flow plumbing fixtures to reduce water consumption
- Installing sprayed foam insulation, high-performance, low-E windows, and ENERGY STAR cooling equipment, lighting and appliances to reduce energy consumption

- Installing an energy-efficient gas boiler with a hot water feature eliminating the need for a separate water heater
- Installing efficient, high-performance ventilation to ensure optimum indoor air quality
- Using low VOC interior paints and varnishes that produced no fumes
- Planting drought-tolerant plants with mulching and trees for shade as part of the overall landscape design

Additional rating points were achieved for reusing the existing building's shell, purchasing as many locally sourced materials and products as possible, and being in an urban area where building residents and employees have ready access to public transportation as well as local stores, banks, supermarkets, libraries, parks, and other amenities.

While some of HeartShare's green building efforts—such as sorting of demolition and construction debris and the use of spray foam insulation—may have taken extra time and resulted in modest increased costs upfront, the long-term benefits to HeartShare and its residents will include lower energy bills and a healthier indoor environment for years to come. HeartShare is committed to doing its part to create a sustainable world and looks forward to using similar green building practices in future projects.

Collaborating with HeartShare on the project were architectural firm Napach Rothenberg Architects of New York City, general contractor Nativo, LLC of Brooklyn, and sustainable construction consultant Steven Winter Design, a division of Steven Winter Associates, Inc.

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Celebrating its 98th year, HeartShare is a nonprofit organization that assists 20,000 New Yorkers. Its wide array of services assist individuals with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities through numerous programs including education services, adult day programs, residential services, case management, recreation programs, family support services, and health care services. HeartShare also provides counseling, after-school programs and assistance with foster care and adoption to children and families, supports people affected by HIV/AIDS, and administers low-income energy assistance programs. HeartShare is proud that 90% of all revenue goes directly to its programs and services. HeartShare is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children and is a BBB Accredited Charity. For more information, visit www.heartshare.org and find HeartShare on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

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