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### **New Playground Built in One Day**

(Richmond Hill, NY)— On Thursday, June 28, over 200 volunteers worked together to build a new playground at HeartShare's Cuomo First Step Early Childhood Center in Richmond Hill, Queens. The Cuomo First Step Center offers high-quality, innovative programs for children from birth to age 5 with developmental delays or disabilities. This program, operated by HeartShare Human Services of New York, provides educational services, speech/language, physical and occupational therapies, music therapy, recreational activities, parent education and support, and more to 180 children with developmental disabilities. These disabilities include autism, mental retardation, Down's Syndrome, behavior disorders, speech and language disorders, and special medical conditions. The Cuomo Center helps children build a strong foundation for their futures. The playground was made possible through KaBOOM! and The Home Depot.

When the day began at 8:30 am, volunteers arrived to find an empty space. Throughout the day, play structures were assembled and put into place, cement was poured, engineered wood fiber was brought in for children's safety, and picnic tables and planter benches were constructed. At 3:00 pm, the wood fiber was being leveled off and everyone was finishing cleaning the area. A brand new playground was in place, complete with a Freddie the Fire Truck, slides, and several structures for climbing. A beautiful new mural was also painted on the side of the school.

At 3:30 pm, the ribbon-cutting ceremony was nearly finished when the skies opened up and the rain came pouring down.

When the children left school on June 22, there was an empty lot; when they returned for summer session on July 2, they were in awe of the magnificent new play area awaiting them. HeartShare is grateful to KaBOOM!, The Home Depot and all the volunteers that helped to make this possible for their children. In addition to the children of the Cuomo Center, children who attend HeartShare's Russo First Step Early Childhood Center a few blocks away will also be able to use the new play space.

Celebrating its 93<sup>rd</sup> year, HeartShare is a nonprofit organization that assists more than 17,000 New Yorkers. Its wide spectrum of services provides counseling, after-school programs and assistance with foster care and adoption to children and families, supports people affected by HIV/AIDS, and administers energy assistance programs. It also helps individuals with developmental disabilities through numerous programs including education services, adult day programs, residential services, case management, recreation programs, family support services, and health services.

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