

Operation Warm helps families face winter

It should go without saying if you're a child walking to school in the cold of a New York City winter, you need a coat.

Yet for many struggling families, the act of providing winter coats for their children is impossible. Often that means children become sick, skip school or may develop low self-esteem.

That's why **Marilyn Johnson, LMSW**, Director, JBFCS Preventive Services which helps families at risk of neglecting their children, eagerly sought out a partnership with Operation Warm.

Since 1998, Operation Warm, a Pennsylvania-based organization, has distributed more than 375,000 new winter coats to children living in poverty throughout the United States. Their affiliate Operation Warm Marketplace sells the coats for \$15 each through strategic partnerships with community organizations such as JBFCS.

"I knew this was something our families in Preventive Services could benefit from. It will help children remain healthy and stay in school," says Marilyn. "I also reached out to **Susan Bear, LCSW-R** Assistant Executive Director responsible for the Family Violence component of the Network Division, because families in domestic violence shelters often have young children and arrive with very little clothing."

The Preventive Services Division purchased 120 coats for all of their programs: Co-Op City Family Services, Neptune Family Services, Pelham Family Center, Southern Brooklyn Family Services, and



Candace McCalla, LMSW, Social Worker at Co-Op City Family Services, shows girl's coat.

Staten Island Family Services.

The Family Violence Division bought 96 coats for the Genesis, Bryce House and Transition Center shelters. The Horizon shelter had already received coats through another gift.

*"The new winter coats will not only keep children warm, but they will also warm the hearts of parents by letting them know someone cares," says **Pierre Thomas, LCSW**, Director, Co-Op City Family Services "During this season of economic uncertainty and strong possibility of job layoffs, the coats couldn't have come at a better time."*

JBFCS volunteers from the Friends program helped sort and bag more than 200 coats which were distributed to programs on October 30. The Friends volunteers are young adults who participate in a variety of agency programs.

When the coats were ready for delivery, workers at each site found a way to give the coats in a respectful manner.

How so?

By giving the coats directly to parents, which allowed the children to receive clothing from their mother, father, or caregiver, their usual providers.

Apparently, the careful planning is paying off.

"This is such a blessing," said one grandmother who is raising her five-year-old granddaughter alone.

