

Equity Restores: The Power Of Creating New Spaces



At New York Cares, we believe all communities deserve beautiful green spaces and warm, inviting places to congregate, celebrate, and learn. In a city where space is at a premium, every neighborhood deserves a shot at equity through the restoration and revitalization of community spaces like parks and public schools.



[Davin Turkewitz](#)

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New York Cares volunteers tend to parks and gardens, paint and clean our gathering places, and improve school spaces like libraries and playgrounds, to create welcoming spaces for young scholars to face the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

Restoration of indoor and outdoor learning spaces – which often include improving the aesthetic quality and organizational elements of the space - is vital to provide an efficient and effective learning environment for students and teachers. Revitalization results in increased student engagement and academic achievement, as well as [increased teacher engagement](#).

According to Christopher Pearson, Community Partnerships Coordinator with New York Cares, “Being able to do school revitalization projects in places in need like Bed-Stuy and Flatbush, is so important... After [students] being out of school for so long, it’s important to restore the feeling of peace and happiness.”

Christopher has worked closely with Aida Rondon, Community School Director for PS 557 K in East New York, to address the need for improved learning spaces. In East Brooklyn, one of our [Communities First](#) zones, the stress and trauma brought on by the pandemic have taken a toll on community members of all ages, but especially children. According to the study,

“The arrangement of space has immediate and far-reaching consequences for teacher’s ability to effectively and efficiently accomplish daily activities, the formation of social and professional relationships, and the sharing of information and knowledge.”

New York Cares has addressed the unique needs of PS 557 K by installing colorful murals, designing and creating an outdoor garden, and connecting the student body with [Story Anytime](#) readings, a virtual project offering diverse online out-loud readings. Christopher said, “Looking out the window and seeing a garden, where there may have been a patch of dirt and seeing a mural on the wall of someone who looks like you makes a huge difference.”

The revitalization of schools has also proven to be an essential way of involving our corporate partners. In partnership with The Home Depot Foundation, we breathed life into an inactive school library at PS 55 X. When school administrators were forced to close the library due to lack of funding, New York Cares secured a grant to redecorate the library with a safari theme that sparked students' imaginations.

Principal Luis Torres said, "Having all those volunteers come in just made me feel that there is still hope in our world." Research from the [University of Salford](#) study found that classroom characteristics such as light, temperature, ownership and flexibility of spaces and its complexity and color improved student learning. In other words, the creation of classroom spaces that are inclusive and address different learning needs.

After seeing firsthand the power of partnership in transforming school surroundings, New York Cares could think of no one better than the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) to work with us to rethink spaces, create innovative environments, and provide support to teachers to create spaces where learning can flourish.

FIT students were challenged to improve a classroom's cosmetic quality, design, and organizational elements. At PS 335 K, FIT students worked in groups of 1-4 to design a classroom and a teacher's lounge with the understanding that New York Cares volunteers are often unskilled in construction, so all ideas should be able to be implemented with that in mind. Some examples of improvements included constructing furniture, painting, organizing, planting, and installing art.

FIT students and PS 335 K both found this program to be incredibly rewarding. Partners loved the new learning spaces and how it positively impacted students and volunteers. FIT appreciated the learning opportunity for their students, working with both a real client and a limited budget. Since our launch at PS 335 K, FIT students have designed learning spaces in four other schools across the five boroughs.

Whether in parks, gardens, or schools like PS 557 K and PS 335 K, we remain committed to discovering what our communities need to succeed and striving for greater equity in our shared spaces. We are proud to help keep our spaces welcoming and inclusive, whether people just want to go for a jog, have a barbecue near a colorful mural, or to learn in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Want to address equity of opportunity by restoring and revitalizing our public spaces and schools? [Visit us here](#). To get started on your volunteering journey, visit [Volunteering Made Easy](#) or [donate](#).