

**CCC Celebration Breakfast  
October 19, 2010,  
Waldorf=Astoria, New York**

**Select Speaker Remarks**

**Luis Ubiñas, Ford Foundation President  
Keynote Speaker**

Let me begin by thanking Melissa Russo for that gracious introduction and of course, expressing my appreciation to the Citizens' Committee for Children for the invitation to speak.

I also want to offer my personal congratulations to today's honorees. First, to Nancy Locker, recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Award: As the former president and chairman of CCC and today the vice president of its board, Nancy has been a consistent and vital presence in this organization's success. I cannot imagine a more appropriate and fitting honor for her than a lifetime achievement award. Congratulations are also in order for the Urban Youth Collaborative, recipient of today's Peabody Award for community activism. Across this city the collaborative is organizing and empowering young people so that their voices are heard—I join the CCC in saluting your dedication and commitment to advancing social justice.

But above all I want to say a word of appreciation to all of you—and the work that you do every day advocating on behalf of New York City's children. For me, your work is all too tangible. It is because of the dedication of individuals such as yourselves, children's advocates like Nancy Locker, and organizations like CCC and the collaborative that I have the privilege of standing before you today.

I grew up in one of the poorest communities in the United States—the South Bronx—only a few subway stops from here, but a world away. My mother was a seamstress, making dresses for 35 cents each in a sweatshop. I had the good fortune, the luck, of having a teacher who intervened and helped me make the transition from a desperately poor public school to one of the finest schools in America. That intervention is what put me on the path to be in front of you today. That intervention changed my vision of the world; it changed the opportunities that I imagined were available to me. I know that I would not be here this morning were it not for the dedication of that teacher, and it's that same sense of dedication that informs your work and CCC's work today. The passion that you bring transforms lives. It is the difference between failure and success for a child. This reality is something I am reminded of everyday when I walk through the doors of the Ford Foundation.

What our country looks like decades from now—the trajectory of America—will depend on the decisions that we as a nation make at this moment about the lives of our poorest children. How we provide for these children; how we open the gateways to social and economic opportunity; how we reduce barriers that stand in the way of personal advancement. Each of these issues will directly affect the America of the future—and the kind of country that all of our children will inherit. There is a profound urgency to this challenge.

There was a time when we would look at a child and think that his or her contribution would come 40, 50 or even 60 years later. But we are in a new era. The capacity for leadership and innovation is forming in our young people at steadily earlier ages.

Our society, now more than ever, is shaped by people barely older than my teenage sons. The examples are myriad, but think of the impact of Facebook, which Mark Zuckerberg created at age 19; Twitter, invented by a pair of young men in their 20s; the ubiquitous Google, a pair of young graduate students. These platforms have changed the way we interact with our family, friends—with each other. But somewhere, a few subway stops from here, in a place like the South Bronx, there is a student in a classroom who could be the next Mark Zuckerberg or the next great social entrepreneur.

How do we, in a world of limitless invention and opportunity, how do we ensure that everyone can contribute? How do we make sure that a child from a poor community—with an idea that can change the world—will be able to compete on the same playing field as the child who is born into a world brimming with limitless privilege? How do we make sure that the child in a poor school, with no real access to transformative, digital technology, with few assets that will enable him to make his way in the world, isn't left behind? At Ford, these questions are at the core of our social justice mission—and at the heart of our advocacy for children both here in the United States and around the world.

Today, I want to talk a bit about how we are trying to answer these questions through our giving. Any agenda focused on children must begin with improving educational opportunities. Some of us here are old enough to remember that it wasn't that long ago that there was a serious debate in this country about whether ethnic and racial differences determined whether children could effectively learn. Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's 1994 book "The Bell Curve"—excerpted on the cover of one of the most prominent liberal magazines in the United States, *The New Republic*—openly questioned whether African American children had the cognitive ability to compete on the same level as white children. It was at the time and remains today an odious argument. But it's one that received mainstream respectability at the time.

Yet something extraordinarily important happened that showed Murray and Herrnstein's thesis to be a pernicious lie—there was an education revolution in this country. Small charter schools and reform public schools began popping up across the United States—in abandoned buildings, in community centers, even in garages. Here in New York, innovators like the founders of KIPP Academy in the South Bronx showed that if children received the same resources and attention as their peers in affluent communities, if they were placed in environments that cultivated and nurtured them, if they stayed in school for longer hours with teachers and administrators who were held fully accountable for performance, not only would they learn, they would flourish. This revolution has taught us that education inequality is neither inevitable, nor intractable. That it is certainly not genetically determined.

Our challenge now is to take the qualities that we've seen succeed in a few schools—longer hours and greater accountability—and transmit them into the core public school systems where the vast majority of our nation's children labor. That is the basic idea behind Ford's Transforming Secondary Education initiative, a public education model which demands a longer school day and greater teacher and student accountability. This is the sort of comprehensive initiative—and philanthropic risk-taking—that we believe can and will change lives.

Of course, while improving public education is crucial—what happens to children who get those educational opportunities, but find the doors to further advancement closed? How do we ensure that resources are available to them when the time comes to take the step to college? To address this issue, we are fighting for Children's Development Accounts. These are wealth-building accounts that offer children from low-income families the opportunity to build assets straight from birth. Not so different from the 401k accounts which benefit so many of us.

Not surprisingly, when this work began many people believed that poor families were simply unable or unwilling to save. Asset-building programs were seen as a waste of time and money. But our experience showed otherwise. We discovered that poor families can and will save when given access to appropriate products and incentives—and that they actually save a greater percentage of income than wealthier families. This program makes it possible for families and their children to see college as something more than an unachievable dream.

Since we started this work, asset-building programs for our poorest citizens have spread like wildfire. In 1997, there were just three Individual Development Account programs in all of America. Today, there are more than 1,100 programs across the country, benefiting some 85,000 savers. The Ford Foundation has now made more than \$60 million in grants to support these matched savings and other asset-building programs nationwide.

Like CCC, our grantees are focused on advocating for life-long savings accounts to move this effort from exceptionally successful beta testing to local, state and national policy. We need to move the dialogue from programs that increase dependence to programs that foster independence and encourage Americans—at all income levels—to be investors in their own futures.

The final part of our agenda for children I'd like to discuss today is access to digital technology. Every element of social justice for future generations—education, health, political engagement and economic opportunity—is dependent on getting the future of digital technology right. But right now, we're failing. When it comes to access and Internet speed, we badly trail the rest of the world. This is happening at a time when being digitally literate is essential to being competitive, even functional, in a 21st century economy.

A whole host of services as well as economic and educational opportunities will depend on basic digital literacy—and yet we're facing a growing digital divide in America, where these opportunities are not attainable for our poorest citizens.

Today, some 65 percent of Americans have broadband access at home—but when it comes to households with incomes below \$25,000, that percentage is the opposite: 65 percent lack broadband connections. What we need to be asking ourselves is what are we doing for the Mark Zuckerbergs in rural and inner-city America who have the same drive and perhaps genius to transform the world—but simply lack the tools, the access, to do so.

At Ford, we believe that every American should have access to high-speed Internet connections. Every American should have a choice of providers to drive competition and innovation. Every American should have the same legal rights and protections online as they do off-line.

Ford has committed \$50-million over the next five years in support of these principles, which have the potential to re-shape the destiny of millions of American children. These three elements—improving educational opportunity, asset building for future growth and technology—are merely a down payment on our children's future.

We need to go even further. We need to create a national Children's Agenda.

We must take on issues like universal pre-K and after school programs. We need to ensure that children are living healthy lives; this means everything from effective child care to nutritious food options. We must guarantee that where a child lives is not an impediment to his or her advancement; that streets are safe and drugs at bay. In short, we need to be thinking comprehensively about how we can make social justice for America's children a reality.

We need an agenda for the future, a Children's Agenda for our future. Our country, our future, demands it.

Thank you.

**Yashira Cividanes, Urban Youth Collaborative**  
**Samuel P. Peabody for Community Activism Recipient**

Good morning everyone. My name is Yashira Cividanes. I am 17 years old, and a senior at the Community School for Social Justice. I am also a youth leader at Sistas & Brothas United. I am so glad to be here on behalf of the Urban Youth Collaborative, the Student Union groups, and all the New York City students who can't be here today to accept this award. We want to thank the Citizens' Committee for Children for acknowledging our hard work and giving us this Social Justice Award.

Social justice is what UYC strives for. The youth are the most controlled population in the world and we're constantly told that we don't know what we want and we don't know what we're talking about. But we do know what we want, and trust me we know what we're talking about. We want sustainable and equitable education. Fighting for our Metro cards was fighting for equity for the thousands of New York City students that were on the brink of being cut off from having accessibility to pursue their education.

They say racism doesn't exist, but that is a lie. Youth of color are the targets of oppression in all forms. Our schools lack resources. There is a lack of job opportunities out there for us. Our families are being pushed out of the community because of gentrification. This is unacceptable, and the UYC will continue to fight until this problem is resolved, and our community, the community of color and young people, is treated with respect.

On behalf of the UYC, I would like to once again thank you for this award. It definitely means a lot to us, and we will be sure to continue to do amazing work with regards to social justice.

**Nancy Locker, CCC Vice President  
Eleanor Roosevelt Award Recipient**

Thank you Jen. I feel overwhelmed looking out over this room filled with so many people and receiving this tremendous honor from Citizens' Committee for Children. It's a privilege for me to share this morning with all of you who have come to support CCC's crucial work and with Melissa Russo, Luis Ubiñas, the activist youth from the Urban Youth Collaborative and of course Jennifer, who are all such powerful voices for New York's children. I want everyone in the CCC Community to know that I truly value being part of this amazing organization and working along side so many wonderful people. CCC has changed my life and helped give it focus.

The good part of being the recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt award is that I get to talk about CCC. All the volunteers and professionals here this morning know the importance of advocacy to leverage government funding, to fix infrastructure, and to set the standards needed to serve and protect New York's children and their families especially in these difficult economic times. Citizens' Committee for Children is New York's premier child advocacy organization. It doesn't take any government money. It doesn't compete for any government contracts. It is the totally independent voice standing up for what is right. There is no budget, no social service delivery system, no programmatic conversation, no legislation impacting children on which CCC has not exerted influence. CCC is the conscience: framing the issues, gathering the stakeholders together, analyzing costs, educating the public including government officials, and holding everyone accountable.

CCC was founded in the 1940s in a divided city and in a time marked by change. Fathers were serving overseas; mothers were working outside the home in unprecedented numbers. Children came home from school to empty apartments. Children's programs were unavailable in most neighborhoods. Poor and minority children were often excluded from the few programs that did exist. It was in this climate that a small group of concerned New Yorkers including Eleanor Roosevelt envisioned the creation of a permanent committee that could harness the power of citizen activists to address a broad range of issues affecting children. The organizers spoke of the need for an agency of individuals with courageous leadership to act as a catalytic influence in the city. And that is what emerged and remains as CCC.

Eleanor Roosevelt argued that for a more humane society to exist individuals have to become leaders; citizens in a democracy must be informed and encouraged to act; social and professional networks have to be created; and the media must be engaged. In one of her My Day articles she wrote about walking out of her apartment in New York City en route to a lecture at the New School and seeing a very thin and poor looking homeless man lying in the street. "What we did was to report him to the first policeman we met which I suppose was the proper thing to do—but it left me feeling very odd." She goes on to say that the more she thought about the incident, the more bothered she became. Just reporting to someone else, not working for change herself, was unacceptable. She advocated that women go out and look at hospitals and schools and detention centers and make their world emerging from war a better place. That's what Citizens' Committee for Children does on an even grander scale today.

I've been giving a lot of thought as to why CCC has become so important to me; why with all the opportunities for involvement in New York City, I feel so engaged and dedicated to this organization. I took the Community Leadership Course 15 years ago and I stayed, and I plan on staying for a long time. Each year, volunteers continue to get educated at CCC on issues and budgets, join task forces

and analytic projects, and travel all over our city to look at programs, administer surveys, and gather data to help staff write reports and position papers and make meaningful realistic recommendations. As part of CCC, I talk to elected and appointed officials, attend City Council hearings, participate in rallies on the steps of City Hall, lobby in Albany, and pay attention to city and state budgets knowing there are limited tax dollars but believing choices can and should be made that won't deprive children of the proven services they need and deserve. I know my participation doesn't make me an expert like the professionals who work at CCC or in the field or the children and families whose lives are so directly impacted by these programs and budgets, but it does make me a more sensitized and responsible citizen and motivates me to think and act differently.

I am involved because Citizens' Committee for Children educates, arouses and changes individuals like me and turns us into passionate and informed advocates for children. It inspires people like me to fulfill our obligation as citizens, and it keeps people like me engaged because its work is fact based, relevant, and powerful. CCC needs and uses trained volunteers and values us as partners.

CCC has a long history of accomplishment. But what's important today is the breadth of our current work and our strategy for the future which has been described this morning. Let me assure you, CCC has never been stronger! It's a good thing since never has it been so needed. CCC's staff under the incredible guidance and direction of Jennifer March-Joly is professional, focused, and strong on outreach to bring all parties together. Under Marcy Sandler and Chris Stern Hyman and a strong and active Board and Advocacy Council, the volunteer component of the partnership is committed and constantly growing including a corps of young people that come through our youth courses. CCC has vision, energy, and expertise, and provides the leadership necessary to protect and expand effective services for children.

Thank you to everyone at CCC for all that you do so well, for including volunteers in your efforts, and for enriching my life. Thank you to everyone in this room for all that you do and for helping CCC stay strong for those most vulnerable and for partnering with us to make our city and state a better, safer, and kinder place to be a child. Each of us has sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and young friends. Though real life presents obstacles, these children have the freedom to dream and the potential of fulfilling those dreams. The film, *Waiting for Superman*, raised the question, "How responsible are we for other people's children?" We might have different answers, different priorities, and different methods, but I believe we share CCC's determination and mission that all children have the opportunity to be healthy, housed, educated and safe.

### **Jennifer March-Joly, CCC Executive Director**

Good Morning. I want to thank all of you here today for rising so early in support of CCC.

A special thank you to our Master of ceremonies Melissa Russo – a journalist whose wealth of knowledge on child and family policy sets her apart from others in her field. I am so pleased that we are honoring the Urban Youth Collaborative, CCC Board Member Nancy Locker, and hearing from keynote speaker Luis Ubiñas today. Each of you makes an essential contribution to civic life and informs the vital discourse that underpins effective child advocacy.

As we gather here today, we are provided with an opportunity to reflect on CCC's accomplishments in the past year - a year in which we called attention to the profound needs of New York City's children and families and fought hard to protect investments in essential public programs.

We released the 9th edition of *Keeping Track of New York City's Children* – the most extensive data source on the status of children in New York City – and expanded our online database to allow users to access, for free, how child well-being has changed in New York City over the last twenty years.

We also released two additional reports – one that documents the experience of youth in state juvenile placement and the other that identifies the strengths and challenges of the child abuse and neglect prevention system. These reports informed the closure of state placement facilities, increased investments in mental health services for youth in state custody, and played a critical role in an advocacy campaign to restore funds for abuse and neglect prevention.

We sent staff and volunteers across the city to hold focus groups and collect data from vendors and community members on the presence and use of green carts. We administered an online survey of Elementary school principals and interviewed clinicians to identify the mental health needs of elementary school children and assess the availability of services. We informed 6,000 New Yorkers through bi-monthly e-newsletters and secured media coverage in 80 different news outlets.

We met year round with elected officials and our electronic advocacy campaigns secured over 20,000 constituent letters. The sheer volume of letters, helped to inform over \$150 million in prudent and critical restorations in the City's Fiscal 2011 Adopted Budget.

Finally, our 2009 Celebration Breakfast and CCC Celebrates at MoMA events fueled our work and the MoMA event was the most successful fundraising event in CCC's history.

We accomplished all of this work with our small staff, unparalleled volunteers, and because so many of you support our efforts and work with us to address the challenges facing children and families.

Your financial support is especially important because CCC, in order to remain independent, does not accept government funding. That means our entire budget has to be raised, from the ground-up, year after year. You make this possible and we thank you for it.

On this solid foundation we must continue to put the needs of New York City's children front and center- the facts presented in keeping track demand that we do nothing less.

Notably, New York City is a bell-weather for children's status nationally. There are 2 million children in the city of New York – nearly double the number of any other city in the nation. As custodians of the largest and most vulnerable population in the country, we have a moral imperative to work harder than ever to make this city a better place for children.

For nearly 20 years, CCC has been collecting data on child well-being and we have come to rely on *Keeping Track* to paint a picture of how children are faring in the city, each borough and the 59 community districts.

Before discussing the impact of the economic downturn on the city's children – it is necessary to remind ourselves that real progress has been achieved since we began collecting data.

Since 1990 in New York City:

- the rate of child poverty has declined by 13 percent,
- the infant mortality rate has been cut in half,
- the foster care population has declined by 44 percent,
- the number of families receiving preventive services has increased by 73 percent,
- the high school drop out rate has declined by 37 percent,
- nearly 850,000 New Yorkers now benefit from the city's earned income tax credit and 50,000 from the local child care credit. And
- the data also documents increased investments over twenty years in universal prekindergarten, child care, children's mental health, health services, youth services and education, among others.

Clearly, keeping track demonstrates that progress can be achieved when early, consistent and targeted investments are made to address children's needs.

Today, data from the most recent edition of *Keeping Track* paints a picture of the troubling hardships faced by New York City's children and families due to the economic crisis.

The recession has brought on a spike in citywide unemployment, a dramatic rise in family homelessness, and a historic increase in the number of New Yorkers seeking food stamps. One in four New York City children—nearly half a million—is living in poverty.

We know too that Black and Latino children face persistent and profound disparities in well-being. The infant mortality rate for Black babies remains nearly twice as high as the citywide average, the teen birth rate for Latinas is 73% higher than citywide average. And Black and Latino youth remain more likely to drop out of high school, more likely to be out of school and out of work, and are more likely to be in local detention and state juvenile placement than their White or Asian peers.

And risks to child well-being also differ dramatically from one neighborhood to the next. The data illustrate that far too many Children and families face incredibly daunting challenges - including greater rates of poverty, chronic health conditions, poor housing, poor education outcomes, greater exposure to crime, and limited access to basic community resources such as banks, libraries and parks.

And yet, when viewing this bleak picture we must steel ourselves with the concrete record of our past victories for children and families and with the knowledge that solutions to the problems facing children can be found in budgets, programs, and policies supporting early, targeted and consistent investments.

To that end, we must use the data to start a budget and policy conversation on what can and must be done.

CCC will be bringing keeping track and our online database to elected officials and colleagues in the direct service fields. Through this effort we seek to improve awareness of the challenges facing New York City's children and to identify opportunities to inform policy and budget priorities.

We fundamentally believe that confronting the disparities faced by those most at risk requires a plan to target and increase investments in our children. Our recommendations are backed up by solid data and evidence of what works and what can be accomplished in the most cost-effective way.

At the state and local level – such a plan should include:

- full day universal pre-kindergarten for 3 and 4 year olds,
- well resourced and high quality infant toddler child care,
- coordinated home-visiting initiatives,
- school based health and mental health services,
- year round academic supports, including sports, arts, and civic engagement opportunities,
- improvements in the quality of meals and snacks offered in all child serving settings, breakfast in the classroom, and increased connections across schools and communities to healthy, affordable food.
- greater numbers of family court judges, and
- the expansion of funds for cost effective alternatives to incarceration, homelessness, and foster care.

Support for these priorities will also require that we work together to inform federal legislation and budget allocations and there are many real opportunities on the horizon – among them:

- the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act,
- Child Care Block Grant and Head Start appropriations,
- the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,
- the ASPIRE Act, and
- the extension of enhancements to the Earned Income and Child Care Tax Credits, to name a few.

Notably, these priorities draw attention to the basic ingredients needed to provide all children with a solid foundation for well-being. And to those who say it is unrealistic to call for increased investments at this time, I would offer that CCC doesn't expect a series of instant victories and wouldn't move forward if we didn't view these services as fundamental. That said, collectively we must be serious and unrelenting in our effort to secure a down payment now and map out a strategy to achieve needed change at a steady pace for all of New York City's children.

I know that I am speaking to an audience of people who rise daily to the challenges New York City's children face: service providers known for best practice, elected and appointed officials who have taken policy risks before, advocates who have secured many budget and policy victories, and funders, corporations, and philanthropists who believe in investing in proven programs and in encouraging government to bring what works to scale.

We thank you and applaud you and ask you to keep it up. CCC and New York City's 2 million children are depending on you.