

BRONX*Times*

Bronx nonprofits host back-to-school bash with free haircuts, backpacks at Bronx Music Hall



Maurice Burbridge, September 11, 2026

On Aug. 27 at the Bronx Music Hall, Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco) and Fortune Society once again co-led a Back-to-School bash.

Two nonprofits joined forces to ensure that Bronx children, and their caregivers, made the most of a few hours: providing free haircuts, backpacks, groceries, community resources and a screening of beloved family film “Encanto.”

On Aug. 27 at the Bronx Music Hall, Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco) and Fortune Society once again co-led a Back-to-School bash, with the intention of building an exhaustive resource hub for Bronx families.

Kerry McLean, Vice President of Community Development at WHEDco, emphasized the importance of helping entire families, rather than solely children, during the back-to-school season.

“Anything that happens with a child at home is gonna affect what they’re doing at school,” McLean said. “It really is about supporting families and supporting what’s happening at home so that our children can thrive when they go to school.”

Prior to the family-friendly film screening, attendees were encouraged to take advantage of resources available from organizations tabling throughout the Bronx Music Hall.

"It's really crucial for our philosophy to just bring a lot of resources together in one place, so that people don't have to go to 10 places to get the same thing," McLean said.

Some of the present local organizations included VNS Health, the Bronx People's Federal Credit Union, the South Bronx Early College Academy, as well as the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence and the NYC Administration for Children's Services.

The Back-to-School bash was hosted with the intention of building an exhaustive resource hub for Bronx families. Photo by Maurice Burbridge

Patrick Gaughan, Peer Specialist at VNS Health's Safe Pathways, used the event as an opportunity to inform families and youth about their suicide prevention and mental health based resources.

"I'm getting into this work really because I feel that there's a need for this kind of support for people, I feel people don't always get the right kind of support when it comes to mental health. I want to be someone who can be there to help the whole person get on the right track," Gaughan said.

Laron Rogers, Program Director of Outreach at The Fortune Society's Atlas Hope initiative, expressed his joy at seeing the improved number of resources and community partners, having returned for a third-year to help organize the Back-to-School Bash.

"It's great. We have some repeat families. We have some new families coming in. Kids are smiling. We have face painting, so they're happy about that," Rogers said.

One local parent, Lisandra Oramas, says she found out about the event through an Instagram post highlighting free family-friendly activities in the Bronx.

"I like that it's very organized. They have a few stations for kids. It's a good time for the kids," Oramas said.

Guillermo Acquino, known as Mr. Willie at Friendly's Barber & Spa, was one of many local barbers helping to give free haircuts to children.

"I love helping people. I like to make smiles on kids, and that's why I'm here. I just want to say that what I'm doing is just to say thank you to the neighborhood and trying to make them believe in themselves and be happy," Acquino said.

Ultimately, children and parents alike were left with smiles as they were directed into the Bronx Music Hall's theater for a screening of the beloved Disney film Encanto.

"It's a family treasure. People love it, but we know sometimes too, given the dearth of movie theaters in the Bronx, that oftentimes our families can't go to movies or don't have access to the movies as some of us did growing up. And also, movies are not cheap. They're expensive. So we're like, you know what? We have this Bronx Music Hall, state of the art theater ... It just seemed like a perfect fit for us to bring something in that has a little spice to it and just really reflect the spirit of our community," McLean said.

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