

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

EDUCATION VINEGAR HILL

☆PREMIUM

BloomAgainBklyn finds a service-based use for discarded flowers

March 27, 2025 Joanna Insco



Jackie Shaldjian, BloomAgainBklyn volunteer with a P.S. 307 second-grade student.

Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insco

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VINEGAR HILL — 25 second-grade students at P.S. 307 learned to select, trim and arrange rescued flowers with the help of Brooklyn-based nonprofit BloomAgainBklyn on Thursday, March 20. A group of 10 BloomAgainBklyn volunteers brought buckets filled with hundreds of donated flowers and lined the hallway outside the classroom with splashes of red roses, yellow daisies, white-speckled baby's breath and more.

When the students arrived, they sat at tables laid with vases and rubber bands. They learned about composting and flower arranging, then made cards for senior citizens.

“I think what they’re going to take away from this is learning more about recycling and repurposing; understanding that not everything has to go into the trash that we can turn it into something else,” said P.S. 307 visual arts teacher Jordanna Gatoff.



BloomAgainBklyn volunteers with P.S. 307 second-grade students. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insco

Although BloomAgainBklyn had visited the school before, this event was the first time that BloomAgainBklyn visited an in-person classroom since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Gatoff’s relationship with BloomAgainBklyn began two years before the pandemic. After extending an invite to the organization, masked volunteers came to the parking lot of P.S. 307 to make bouquets for teacher appreciation.

“Being able to partner with BloomAgainBklyn and having the opportunity to expand things for my students is just wonderful,” said Gatoff.

The recent visit was a part of BloomAgainBklyn's social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, "Agents of Change." The program started in 2017 after BloomAgainBklyn Founder Caroline Gates-Anderson appeared on NY1 News as the New Yorker of the Week. Soon after her appearance, Gates-Anderson was asked to come speak with Speyer Legacy School students who were studying agents of change.



Rescued flowers. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insco

"We haven't thanked channel one," laughed Chief Marketing Officer, Director of BloomAgainBklyn and husband of Gates-Anderson Richard L. Anderson. "It's just kind of serendipitous how these things happen."

Gates-Anderson believed that bringing BloomAgainBklyn's flower-arrangement programming into the classroom would provide a better learning experience than coming to talk, so a group of volunteers came to Speyer Legacy and the agents of change program kicked off.

"I think it really makes a difference to children to be able to have an impact in such a direct way — in a way they can understand and enjoy. To have so much creative agency," said Gates-Anderson. "Maybe you can't write a story, and maybe you're not good at

grammar, but you will be good at creating something beautiful from nature and flowers. And then, being able to extend that by giving it to somebody, you will make a difference in their day.”

BloomAgainBklyn was founded in 2014 by Gates-Anderson and [current-board-member](#) Donna Whiteford. Gates-Anderson, a longtime fan of flowers, became concerned about the wastefulness of the floral industry following a pop-up event she coordinated with local artist Ken Rush at Opalia Flowers. After the event Phoebe Crary, founder of Opalia Flowers, shared with Gates-Anderson that thousands of dollars of flowers from florists, grocers, weddings and events enter the waste stream when they cannot be sold. Prompted by this, Gates-Anderson went to Trader Joe’s to inquire about their unsold bouquets. The store agreed to donate the flowers that would otherwise go to waste and BloomAgainBklyn was born.



P.S. 307 second-grade student enjoying flowers. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insko

Now, 11 years later, what started on the back deck of the Gates-Anderson brownstone has expanded into a staff of six people with over 3,500 volunteers and 80-plus community and corporate partners.

“The genius of what Caroline has uncovered is that the extension of flowers is amazing,” said Anderson. “It brings everybody together and they’re so happy and they come away with a lot of knowledge and feeling.”

The array of flowers for Thursday’s event came from three large florist designers in NYC: Winston Flowers, Bouqs Co. and Starbright Floral. The orchestration of collecting,

breaking down, preparing and delivering the flowers is what Anderson called a “logistical nightmare and a logistical marvel.”



P.S. 307 second-grade students make cards for senior citizens. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insco

“There’s a tremendous amount of logistics involved but we’ve been able to find a formula model that works,” said Anderson. “We’re lucky. It’s really a true volunteer operation. We wouldn’t be anything without volunteers.”

Jackie Shaldjian is one of ten BloomAgainBklyn volunteers who visited P.S. 307 on Thursday. She walked the children through the plan for making flower arrangements and taught them about the pink-tipped national flower of South Africa, the King Protea.

“They loved it, their eyes lit up when they saw the flowers, then their eyes grew even bigger when they started working with them. It was amazing,” said Shaldjian. “It’s super gratifying and it’s so much fun.”



P.S. 307

second-grade student enjoying flowers. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insco

BloomAgainBklyn has grown beyond its initial focus — the recipients — and Gates-Anderson described the relationships between volunteers and employees as a happy accident.

“The aha moment was when the people who were working with the flowers — the volunteers, the corporate employees — formed a community,” said Gates-Anderson. “I think the creativity, the self-care, the therapeutic effect of nature and flowers brought the community of volunteers together. It’s an incredible kind of connective experience to work with flowers.”

This connective aspect of BloomAgainBklyn was another impetus for its beginnings, and one that Gates-Anderson and co-founder Whiteford hoped would make a difference in a world they saw as growing increasingly lonely.



P.S. 307 second-grade students make cards for senior citizens. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insco

“When we launched it, we knew that people were isolated and that their isolation was as dangerous as a medical disease like cancer,” said Gates-Anderson. “Whether they’re 75 years old or 20, the bonding aspect of it, the in-person part of BloomAgainBklyn, is something beautiful and what dispels the isolation that people are feeling. That’s why people come back and back, because they want people to stop and converse and connect. It’s the connectivity that an uplifting creative environment allows.”

That community impact did not go unnoticed by the children, many of whom were proudly showing volunteers their flower selection or receiving assistance as they shortened stems and secured rubber bands.

“The fact that there were so many volunteers that came and were hands-on with my students, they understand that there’s more people out there that they can work with and learn from. For them to see just past me that there’s more to offer them in the world; that’s a wonderful opportunity for them,” said Gatoff.

Looking to the future, BloomAgainBklyn hopes to continue to pursue its Agents of Change program, specifically in P.S. 307 and other Title I schools experiencing systemic

inequities. BloomAgainBklyn has the curriculum, the volunteers and the vision, but financial restrictions have prohibited expansion into more schools or an in-depth series. Gates-Anderson said, “We just can’t do it without a sponsor. Private sponsor, corporate sponsor that’s our next steps and that’s our ambition together. For the schools that need this kind of creative outlet the most.”

“I think it’s extremely important to give them the resources to put them on a level playing field because they certainly have the abilities,” continued Gates-Anderson. “They just have to be given the opportunity and I think this gives them the opportunity.”