A few of the children who participated in the recent ABC World Asthma Day Poster Competition, displaying artwork that describes what it is like to have asthma.

Mailman School Steps up Asthma Care Campaign
By Elisha Sessions

Children living in Washington Heights and Inwood have one of the highest rates for asthma in all of Manhattan because of the area's pollution and because families often wait too long for diagnosis. The Mailman School of Public Health has been assisting these children through an initiative called Asthma Basics for Children (ABC), aimed at parents of children with asthma. And now, with the help of a $2 million grant from the Merck pharmaceutical company, the school will work with community groups to offer services such as home visits to identify environmental triggers for asthma.

"We experimented with these new services to about 250 families a year," said Sandy Findley, the director of ABC and soon to be the co-principal investigator for the new program, called WIN for Asthma.

According to Findley, ABC currently reaches about 1,500 families per year, but the education in a group environment and the ability to guide asthma education is helpful for families whose children do not have severe or persistent asthma, Findley says, but for those who do, extra support is needed to help these families find the best way to bring their children's asthma under control.

Besides home visits, the extra support will include training for community health advocates about early treatment methods.

Mary McCord, a pediatrician at Morgan Stanley's Children's Hospital and slated to be another of WIN's principal investigators, said that one reason the asthma rates for children in these neighborhoods is so high is that people wait too long to treat it. "Often only acute episodes of asthma are treated—and that's during visits to the emergency department—visits that are preventable," she said.

"The sooner we can help families manage their children's asthma, the sooner the children can benefit," she added, "not only by staying out of the hospital but also by full participation in school and sports activities. Once the early treatment methods are mastered, the children and their families stand to benefit for years."

Student Financial Services Achieve High Pledge Rate for Community Service Campaign
By Gene Roman

In late November 2005, Joe Pappalardo attended a meeting of senior managers in the Office of Student Financial Services to develop a strategy to support Columbia's 59th Annual Community Service Appeal Campaign (CCS). The campaign collects donations from University faculty and staff to support local neighborhood agencies in their work with the elderly, the homeless, the unemployed and children.

Now, less than three months later, the student financial services team can boast of a 94 percent pledge rate from the departments' 45 full-time employees. Pappalardo, the manager of budget and administration, shares the credit for this with two of his colleagues and fellow CCS co-captains, James Williams and Ava Gardner.

Pappalardo had recruited Williams, an assistant billing manager for students, and Gardner, a student accounts coordinator, after learning of their strong outreach and customer service skills.

"I'm happy they picked me to help," Williams said. "This is a worthy cause, and I love doing it."

"I like interacting with others and this gives me the opportunity to become more involved," Gardner added. "I've enjoyed explaining the importance of the campaign to my coworkers."

The three co-captains divided up their colleagues and made it a point to sit down with each person to explain the mission of the community service campaign.

"It's usually best to let them know about CCS before asking for a contribution," Williams said. "That way, they feel comfortable about giving. People like it when you tell them where their money is going."

Along with traditional solicitations, the three financial services colleagues decided to make use of some old office equipment in their department. They reprocessed computers in our office that we were debating what to do with," Pappalardo explained. "So I suggested to our boss, Michelle Brown-Nevers, assistant vice president of student financial services, that we raffle off the computers and donate the funds to CCS. She eagerly agreed."

The raffle, which was held last month, raised an additional $200 for CCS.

The exemplary leadership displayed by these three employees earned the following words of praise from Brown-Nevers: "I'm proud of the work Ava, Joe and James have done to get the staff even more motivated. Their dedication to this cause has increased the participation in CCS by student financial services beyond our expectations."