

# UNION SETTLEMENT

## Free School Lunch for All NYC Middle-Schoolers



Beginning this September, school lunch is free for all New York City middle school students. The pilot program will ensure that all students in sixth through eighth grades have access to a nutritious lunch daily, regardless of a family's income or free lunch eligibility. School lunch, as several studies have noted, provides the energy for students to improve concentration and memory. By eating regular meals, students attend class more regularly and improve their grades.

Students at our BRIDGES after school program at Isaac Newton Middle School advocated for free school lunch as part of the Lunch 4 Learning campaign, a coalition of students, community organizations, and city and state legislators. They surveyed over 300 of their peers to find that fewer than 20% reported "always" eating school lunch. One-third of those surveyed believed they'd be bullied for doing so, though 98% of the children attending this school qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Students **Isaiah Brown, Gloria Cruz, Kayla Jimenez, and Kyara Vasquez** presented their findings in a meeting with Public Advocate Letitia James. Later Ms. Cruz and Ms. Jimenez testified before the City Council. Ms. Cruz, 8th grader and participant in the Lunch 4 Learning campaign, stated, "Students think that if their friends won't eat it, that they shouldn't eat the school lunch, either." She told city council members that making school lunch universally free would remove the stigma, and result in more students eating lunch and doing better in school.

For the 2014-15 academic year, these student advocates will draw upon their summer experiences visiting school and community gardens to work with the New York City Department of Education's School Food program to improve the breakfast and lunch menus for all students. With increased participation and a delicious, healthy menu, they hope to expand the pilot program to include free lunch for all children in NYC elementary and high schools.

# A Message from the Executive Director



Harlem, with over 650 clients seeking individual, group and family counseling each year.

Our seniors are a special focus for our wellness work – we serve over 250,000 fresh and nutritious meals to seniors every year, and also work to ensure that the seniors remain healthy through our exercise classes, walking clubs, Senior Swim events, Tai Chi and many other wellness activities.

Our goal is to ensure that all our program participants – from the youngest to the oldest – become active participants in maintaining and improving their own health, and the health of their family members and the entire community.

Thank you for your support in this effort.

David Nocenti

Executive Director

Dear Friends of Union Settlement:

Union Settlement offers literally dozens of education, wellness and community-building programs and activities for East Harlem residents. This newsletter focuses on the middle pillar of our work, which seeks to improve the health and well being of our neighbors.

Our wellness initiatives start at the earliest age, where we ensure that the almost 700 children in our early childhood education program receive fresh, healthy meals. We also provide vision and dental screenings for the children, and make sure that parents can address childhood health issues like asthma. The focus on wellness continues through in our Youth Services programs, where the work expands to include discussions about safe sex practices, substance abuse, reducing community violence and leading healthy lifestyles.

Union Settlement is also the largest community-based mental health service provider in East



*Seniors at a Tai Chi class*

Like us on Facebook  
[facebook.com/unionsettlement](https://www.facebook.com/unionsettlement)

Follow us on Twitter  
[@unionsettlement](https://twitter.com/unionsettlement)



# Health, Nutrition and Fresh Local Produce Abound

At the Union Johnson Early Learning Center a free nutrition workshop with a cooking lesson, provided by the NYC Department of Health Farm to Preschool program, is beginning. On the menu today is Cabbage and Dill Salad—an easy way to prepare the fresh cabbage distributed that afternoon through the Fresh Food Box Program. This pilot program is a collaboration with Farm to Preschool and Grow NYC. It happens every Tuesday through November 25, and while it focuses on the families and staff at Union Johnson, anyone in the neighborhood can join the workshops and sign up for a box of local fruits and vegetables.

Union Settlement is the only site in East Harlem participating in the pilot, which is offered weekly through Thanksgiving. Community members who join the cooking and nutrition workshops receive recipes in both English and Spanish and Farmers' Market Health Bucks. **Latesha Curtis**, Assistant Cook at Union Johnson, says, "The food we serve here is healthy, and now the children can experience it at home as well as in school... the parents love it."



This is just one example of how Union Settlement, either on its own or in partnership with others, offers healthy and nutritious food across its programs. We serve more than 500,000 fresh healthy meals per year to people of all ages from toddlers to seniors. Our early childhood programs place a top priority on wellness and we partner with the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) to teach our children and their families about healthy eating. This fall the CMOM partnership will expand from one center to cover all seven Union Settlement Early Childhood Education Centers and our network of home-based early childhood providers.

By focusing on wellness as well as quality education we are able to give our children a strong foundation, which is especially important given the serious health disparities that the East Harlem community faces. Our children love the fresh, nutritious meals they eat at our centers; their parents and families join them to learn how to prepare nutritious meals and now they can bring fruit and vegetables home.



*A three-year-old participates in a nutrition activity*



## Staff Spotlight: Ledonia Baruch

Fitness Fridays in the Washington Community Center. She remembers one of her students who was particularly reserved and shy when she first met him. He attended classes sporadically and barely spoke. After a few sessions his behavior started to change. “He started coming to our workshops regularly and got better grades, and told me that it’s because of Friday Fitness,” she noted. By the end of the year, he had attended more hours of our classes than all but one student in his group.

**Ledonia Baruch** is a workforce advocate for Union East by day, and a leaping, fun-loving fitness coach by night. According to Ledonia the two roles are not exclusive.

“I try to reach the kids in lots of ways,” Ms. Baruch said. “There’s a lot more to teaching than the auditory and visual methods that are used in classrooms. Kids need to move, they need kinesthetic learning.”

Before participating in our Teen Nights, Ledonia led

Ledonia believes the students return to her fitness classes because it helps them feel better. Exercise is a noted stress reliever and face-to-face contact with a coach who is challenging them is a good break from all the screens they look at during the day. The kids agree: one participant said that she liked how Ledonia made the fitness class hard but fun. Ledonia wants the kids to know that they can achieve a healthy body, a healthy mind, and a healthy life: “Consistency is key, working hard at their goals in studies and fitness, that’s how they get stronger.”

*“I try to reach the kids in lots of ways.”*





## Día de los Muertos

Acompáñanos este 30 de Octubre para nuestro 18 aniversario del festival del Día de los Muertos. Este evento ofrece actividades para familias con niños para todas las edades, incluyendo: preparando calaveras de azúcar, cenando comidas típicas Mexicana, y disfrutando obras de teatro y música.

## Day of the Dead

Join us for our 18th Annual Day of the Dead celebration on Thursday, October 30th. This family-friendly event has activities for children of all ages, including: making sugar sculptures, eating traditional Mexican cuisine, and enjoying musical and theatrical performances.

## Update: Toasting Union Settlement

On Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> we will host our fall fundraiser, *Toasting Union Settlement*, right here in East Harlem. We're excited to hold the event at our Union Johnson Early Learning Center at 1829 Lexington Avenue (at 113<sup>th</sup> Street) from 6:30 to 8:30 pm.

*To become a sponsor or purchase tickets visit [UnionSettlement.org/Toasting](http://UnionSettlement.org/Toasting).*



*Program alumnus Anthony Leslie speaks at last year's Toasting Union Settlement*

# VISTA Tribute

This fall Union Settlement says goodbye to three AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers: **Katherine Randall, Ashley Mebert** and **Shaqwanda Everett** (at right, top to bottom). The VISTA program entails one year of community service focused on building capacity in organizations that serve low income communities. Shaqwanda worked with elementary school children in our Youth Program where she increased our volunteer base of Homework Helpers, conducted parent engagement programs and created a Youth Ambassador program to promote civic engagement among the children. Ashley worked on public advocacy for the agency. She successfully conducted community organizing and outreach events for the Lunch for Learning program, a campaign for free and healthy school lunches for every New York City student. Katherine assisted with fundraising, community outreach and special events. She played key roles in the 50th Anniversary celebration of our College Readiness Program, in the annual Ethnic Festival and in prospect research for fundraising purposes. Union Settlement thanks our VISTAS for their hard work and dedication.



## Thank You to Our Generous and Dedicated Volunteers!

Corporate partners provide Union Settlement with valuable and wonderful volunteer support. Hundreds of volunteers have contributed to our work during the last six months.

- **Carver Bank** assisted in the preparation for our successful Ethnic Festival.
- **Goldman Sachs** and **LinkedIn** separately participated in a garden clean in El Sitio Feliz Garden
- **Morgan Stanley** hosted parties for seniors and another one for young fathers
- **Neuberger Berman** held a “healthy habits” party for our seniors.

## Update: NYC Marathon

On Sunday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, we'll be cheering our Union Settlement runners from 113<sup>th</sup> Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Come join us and show your support! This year, Union Settlement's marathon team is comprised of eight runners:

Priscilla Almodovar  
Greg Andres  
Nicole Bestard  
Helen Cantwell  
Renee Coronado Martinez  
Margaret Davenport  
Lorraine Martinez  
Cari Wint

*You can also support Union Settlement and our runners by visiting:*

*[crowdrise.com/UnionSettlement2014NYC](http://crowdrise.com/UnionSettlement2014NYC)*



*Will Buford running the marathon as part of the Union Settlement team*

## Union Settlement Board of Directors

Reginald E. Harwell, Chair  
Eli Gross, Vice Chair  
Ruth E. Pachman, Vice Chair  
Christopher Quiñones, Treasurer  
David K. Carlson, Assistant Treasurer  
Elisabeth Schupf Lonsdale, Assistant Treasurer  
Maxine L. Rockoff, Ph.D., Secretary  
Gina Rusch, Assistant Secretary

Kate Buford  
Helen V. Cantwell  
David Castelblanco  
Susan Chapman  
Francesca Curtin  
Angelique Diaz  
Kalaivani S. Duane  
DeNora M. Getachew  
Ricardo Granderson  
Caren A. Heller, M.D.  
Adam Scott Herbst  
Françoise LeGoues  
James B. Lynch  
A. Slade Mills, Jr.  
Walter G. Montgomery  
Julio Rodriguez  
Andrew Schwalm  
Robin Sparkman  
Szilvia Szmuk-Tanenbaum, Ph.D.  
David Thomas, M.D.  
Kate B. Townsend  
Susan Wiviott  
Dawn M. Zappetti

*Union Settlement  
welcomes new  
board members  
Susan Chapman  
and Angelique Diaz.*

# UNION SETTLEMENT

237 East 104<sup>th</sup> Street | New York, NY 10029



[ny.give.org](http://ny.give.org)