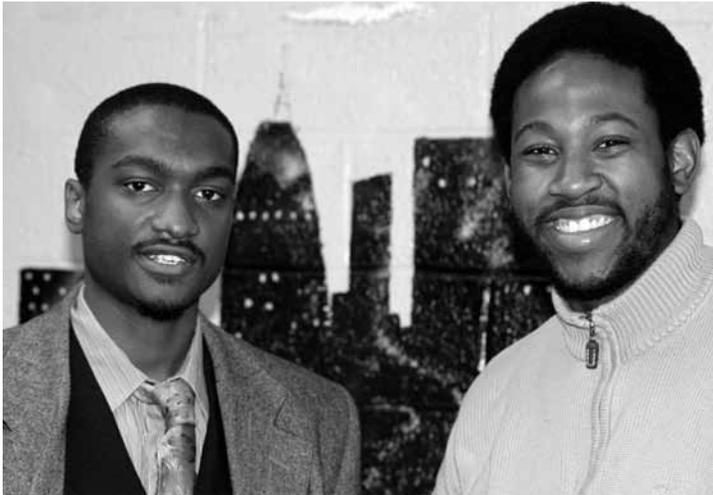




Reconnecting Youth to Education, Family and Work



Anthony Boykin (left) with Youth Advocate Timothy Roulhac. Anthony passed the GED in December.

Since 2008 Union Settlement has worked with young men who are out of school and unemployed through our Reconnect and Rise program. 13% of East Harlem teens do not attend school and have no diploma or GED, the highest concentration in Manhattan. While these so called “disconnected youth” are now the focus of growing attention in our city and our nation, Union Settlement is steeped in their needs and our program is proving to be a model in this area of youth development.

“Union Settlement Association’s successful Young Adult Literacy Program makes a strong case for new investment,” said **Veronica M. White**, Executive Director of the Center for Economic Opportunity, a unit of the Mayor’s Office which funds the program. “Providers from across the five boroughs and in partner cities across the country are learning from Union Settlement’s experience to launch new literacy and internship programs to help our cities’ youth.”

“The biggest thing that inner city, disconnected youth need is a chance to thrive,” said **Richard Reeves**, Program Coordinator, Reconnect and Rise. “Our program includes academic and social development as well as crisis intervention in order to meet these young men at a crossroads in their lives.”

With its strong community roots and effective youth development and adult education GED programs, Union Settlement was well prepared to work with young people who were struggling to overcome major life challenges. Many of the young men we serve are criminal or juvenile justice involved; they have no experience in the work place; a large number are non-custodial fathers with young children and some live in unstable home environments. In general their schools have failed them and they enter our program testing at a 4-8th grade level in language arts and math. This means that they are not ready to enroll in a GED prep class.

Despite these challenges, we help these young men identify their strengths, talents and dreams. At Union Settlement they find support, appropriate education programs, teachers who understand their challenges and educational needs, counseling, and job readiness programs. They meet other students just like them who are making progress and their example provides motivation and hope.

Initially the program focused on instruction and education, but the young men also needed to find employment and to start earning income. As a result, we added work readiness workshops, developed internship opportunities to give the students experience and offered modest stipends. An assessment of this approach showed that the student’s academic progress was greater and they achieved this more quickly with the addition of internships and work experience. We also see that real work experience helps to show our students the benefits of further education and after they complete their GEDs they are pursuing college and vocational training.

We are very pleased to report that more and more of the young men in this program are succeeding. **Anthony Boykin**, pictured above, is one of five young men who passed the GED in December. He is working, seeking more skilled employment and planning to apply to college.

Steven Portericker, Director of Youth Services, explains that this program “was designed to meet the needs of the young people. It is important that the young men feel connectedness, caring, support and responsiveness in order to get past the many obstacles of everyday life. I am proud of Anthony Boykin and the other GED recipients for achieving goals that were inconceivable only months ago.”

A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Union Settlement:

Most people think of Union Settlement as a provider of essential services to assist the residents of East Harlem. And that certainly is an integral part of what we do.

But Union Settlement also fills another vital role – advocating for changes in government policies to address the needs of the poor. Often our advocacy focuses on fighting cutbacks in government services, such as New York City’s current efforts to reduce funding for child care, after-school programs and senior services. At other times, we are looking to change laws that impose hardships on the needy, or make it harder for us to serve this community.



Currently, Union Settlement is one of the leaders in an effort to change a law that, I am sure, you will find it hard to believe exists.

In particular, according to the State Education Department (SED), it is a felony for a social service organization to employ licensed social workers to provide services to the poor, unless they get a waiver to do so from SED.

That position defies common sense, by criminalizing the very act of providing social work services, which is one of Union Settlement’s core missions. (SED’s reasoning is too complex to explain in this short space, but you can read a fuller description in my New York Daily News op-ed piece, which is available at www.unionsettlement.org/davidnocenti.) Needless to say, this makes it much harder to provide crucial social services to those in need.

The only way to address this problem is for Union Settlement to join with other non-profits and ask the State Legislature and the Governor to change the law, and that is what we are doing. If we are successful, we will benefit not just the individuals we serve here in East Harlem, but also those who turn to non-profit social workers for assistance throughout New York State. An important task indeed.

Thank you for your support, and for helping us to advocate on behalf of those in need.

— David Nocenti

Staff Spotlight: Diana Cardenales

More than 25 years ago, **Diana Cardenales** brought her daughter to Union Settlement for child care. Our Leggett Child Care Center offered Diana, a single mother, support and connected her to new resources. When she learned the GED class in our adult education programs, she enrolled and was able to obtain her GED. Diana used her degree to take a position at Union Settlement as a receptionist. Within a couple of years she moved to Union Settlement Home Care as a file clerk and has worked her way up to case coordinator over time.

Born and raised in East Harlem Diana says, “Union Settlement has helped me a lot!” And Diana has helped her clients a great deal as well. She is currently responsible for coordinating services to 95 home care clients. She assigns each client a Home Care worker, and then supervises the placement to make sure her client’s needs are met.

“I really like it when I see that my clients are happy and well cared for.” Diana explains that, “Sometimes I just know which aide will be a good fit for my client.”

After 25 years of service to Union Settlement, Diana Cardenales has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of elderly clients by helping them to continue to live independently.



Meet the VISTAs!



Left to right: Shannon Hughes, Chelsea Brewer and Annie Whalen

This year Union Settlement is hosting three AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, each of whom has volunteered to work full time for a year. They are helping the agency with capacity building projects. The VISTAs each bring their own distinct skills and talents to help Union Settlement better serve the East Harlem community.

After completing her degree at Hampton University, **Chelsea Brewer** was looking for a way to connect with young people and create social change. She learned about the VISTA position with our Union East program, which provides supportive services to high school students at Park East High School, and decided to take a chance. She was selected for the position and moved across the country from Southern California to work with Union Settlement. Chelsea has been in New York six months now, enjoying the city and working hard to make our Union East program even stronger.

Shannon Hughes had prior experiences working in communications, political organizing and education. After graduating from Hunter College she was looking for a longer volunteer opportunity. Since November she has been helping to build a network of students who have completed our College Readiness Program. Since 1964 this program has helped over 19,000 young people gain admissions to college, many of them were the first in their families

to do so. With thousands of graduates to track down she's got her work cut out for her, but she's certainly up to the job. Our next newsletter will report on her progress with the network and on some of our alumni's experiences.

Annie Whalen has a strong interest in issues of community development, both locally and globally. She happened upon the posting while browsing the AmeriCorps website from Rwanda, where she spent the summer working with a micro granting program. After a few Skype interviews she decided to take the position which is split between the Intergenerational Tutoring Program and the Development Department. Annie is already building a stronger East Harlem by placing volunteer tutors in our Youth Services and soliciting new funding sources!

This newsletter includes an article by each of the volunteers on a topic related to their work with us and their interest in the East Harlem community.

We hope to continue this program and recruit a new group of VISTAs in August. If you want to learn more about the program, please contact Ari Briski, abriski@unionsett.org or (646) 672-5082.

Sign up to Become a Volunteer at
www.unionsettlement.org/volunteer

Chew on This

By Chelsea Brewer,
AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer



The title of this article is also the name of the Union East Program's cooking workshop. High school students from the East Harlem community learn how to prepare healthy and delicious meals. Each workshop includes a food education curriculum that explains how to make smart food choices. Through this twelve week workshop, students shop at a farmers' market, plan a dinner party for family, and learn how to be savvy consumers. Although most students see the workshop as a fun after school activity, they gain important skills and lessons that can be carried home to their families. According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, East Harlem has the highest proportion of obese adults among all New York City neighborhoods. By engaging high school students in healthy eating habits, Union Settlement Association is hoping to change how the community views food.

Each workshop begins with a few minutes of stretching and breathing, which helps participants reduce stress after a long day at school. The exercise is followed by a twenty minute lesson on a particular topic related to food, such as reading a recipe. After the lesson, Union East chefs begin to prepare their meal. They slice and dice, stir and measure before heading to the kitchen to cook. Everyone is given the chance to participate in the kitchen. Chefs also clean and set the table before the meal. Each workshop ends with the chefs gathered at the table to enjoy the food they prepared.

Participants in the workshop range from ages sixteen to eighteen. For many, this is their first time cooking an entire meal on their own. The mantra for the workshop is "Thinking Like a Chef." While creating their culinary masterpiece, each participant is given a chef hat and apron. The workshop introduces different cultures and styles of cooking. In one of the first workshops, students prepared and cooked chicken stir-fry. The education curriculum for the meal conveyed the importance of color in fruits and vegetables, and the nutrients they contain. Future menu items include desserts such as apple cake with raspberry coulis.

The Union East Program believes that this cooking class can aid students in more ways than just healthy food choices. As a way of targeting reading comprehension and listening skills, students are asked to read aloud and follow along as recipe instructions are given. Union East participants use math to calculate measurements as some recipes may be doubled for larger groups. Participants learn patience and responsibility in the kitchen. Proper knife skills and kitchen safety are required for continued participation in Chew on This.

Chew on This is imperative in aiding the community to fight against the health disparities it faces. With the help of a nutritionist, participants learn how to adapt their favorite recipes into healthier versions. Participants learn to read labels and understand what they are putting into their bodies. Fast food is also addressed by allowing participants to read ingredient lists from popular restaurants. They are then split into two groups where they must debate as the restaurant and the consumer. Chew on This proves that education can be interactive, engaging, and fun. This Union East workshop is taking preventative measures to address the health needs of the East Harlem community.

Serving the Immigrant Community, Past and Present

by Shannon Hughes,
AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer



Union Settlement was established 117 years ago to serve the needs of East Harlem's growing immigrant population. Much has changed in East Harlem since we first opened our doors, but Union Settlement continues to be an essential service provider for immigrant families in the community.

East Harlem has been the destination of choice for an ever changing variety of cultures. When Union Settlement was founded in

1895 the organization served mostly German and Irish immigrants. This quickly changed as the area welcomed a massive immigration of Italian and Jewish families at the turn of the century. The next big change came in the 1940's, when a large wave of Puerto Rican immigration gave the neighborhood its nicknames "El Barrio" and "Spanish Harlem." Over the past fifteen years the neighborhood has seen a large influx of new comers from Mexico and Central America.

A growing Muslim population, many of whom hail from West Africa, is also a relatively new presence in East Harlem. The Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the first Mosque built in New York City, was opened in 1991 on 96th Street and 3rd Avenue. The center serves as a spiritual and cultural hub for many of these new neighbors, and as their community continues to grow so does the Muslim population of East Harlem.

East Harlem has also seen its Asian population more than double in the last decade. According to an analysis by the CUNY Center for Urban Research of recent census data, approximately 70% of these new arrivals are of Chinese decent, many of whom have migrated from downtown to seek out a more affordable housing while keeping close to the 6 train, which easily connects them to the services of Chinatown.

For Union Settlement, meeting the needs of an ever-changing population has presented challenges. We are constantly evolving as an agency to better serve the East Harlem community.

The ability to communicate effectively with community members is critical for any service provider. As the demographics of the neighborhood change, there is an increasing need for a staff who can communicate with new residents in their native language. Union Settlement has been making strides in ensuring that we can communicate in a wide range of languages. Senior Services is currently seeking out volunteers who are able to speak Mandarin with older Chinese immigrants.

"At Union Settlement, we embrace and celebrate everyone in the community," said **Maria Alejandro**, Director of Senior Services. "We welcome the opportunity to work with diverse communities and are constantly trying to develop ways to meet their particular needs." One such program that has been recently implemented is a new transportation shuttle that provides monthly visits to Chinatown, where seniors can buy groceries, visit their doctors and check in with family.

The Adult Education program, in an attempt to better serve the diverse community, has sought to increase cultural sensitivity through a staff member who has served as a "Cultural Navigator." This staff member works with teachers in Adult Education to make sure new Muslim and other students feel welcomed into Union Settlement's classes.

East Harlem is a community that has been built by successive waves of diverse immigrant populations. As the specific popula-

tions change we strive to make sure that Union Settlement remains a welcoming place where diverse cultural traditions can be celebrated and shared.

Meals on Wheels at Union Settlement

By **Annie Whalen**,
AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer



Each day, Monday through Saturday, Union Settlement's cooks arrive at our Jefferson Senior Center as early as 4:30 am to begin the preparation of meals for over 300 homebound seniors. They are soon joined by about 15 other staff members and sometimes volunteers, who gather in the dining room to pack and sort the meals for delivery. Reminiscent of a large family, the staff jokes and share stories together as they pack.

When it comes to getting the job done, however, the team is organized and efficient, taking care to ensure that each client receives both a hot and a cold, nutritionally balanced meal each day before 1 pm. At about 11 o'clock in the morning, 10 meal carriers disperse to make their deliveries throughout East Harlem. As **Mark Grant**, a deliverer with Union Settlement's Meals on Wheels program, puts it, "It starts out as a job but ends up being more of a consideration. Our clients look forward to seeing us every day." Mark delivers meals to 40 clients daily; he has memorized his route and knows each client's name by heart.

For many of the seniors that we serve, our Meals on Wheels program meets both a tremendous physical and emotional need. With scant supermarkets and limited fruit and vegetable availability, East Harlem has been declared a "food desert" by the New York City Department of City Planning. This lack of readily available, affordably priced, healthy food options hits the senior community especially hard, as most seniors have a fixed income and many have mobility challenges that prevent them from traveling to

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Thank You for Supporting Our Holiday Celebrations!



At Leggett Child Care Center, Pre-School Teacher, Tyrone Bryant dressed up in Santa gear to distribute presents to eager students.

The holiday spirit was high last December, many thanks to the contributions of our wonderful volunteers, donors, and staff. Thousands of people from across New York City pitched in to donate a gift or volunteer their time, allowing Union Settlement to throw 19 parties and distribute over 2,000 gifts to senior citizens and children ages 2-16.

We especially thank our corporate gift drive partners: Bryan Cave LLP, CASA Columbia, Digitas, East Harlem Café, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Fisher Brothers, Metro Hope Church, New York Academy of Medicine, New York Life Insurance Company, RLM Finsbury, Savoy Bakery, and the YES Network.

Union Settlement Builds “Safe Space” for East Harlem LGBT Community

Union Settlement is working to better serve the LGBTQ community in East Harlem through a new “Safe Space” network.

Two years ago several Union Settlement program directors began to notice a lack of supportive services for LGBTQ individuals in East Harlem. **Melissa Nieves**, Director of Adult Education, attended a meeting of the Harlem United Black Men’s Initiative, a group that aims to reduce rates of HIV and STI infection among young Black and Latino men. Several of the young men spoke about the harassment they had faced in school as a result of their sexual and gender identity, a barrier that prevented many of them from obtaining a degree. Melissa was very alarmed, “It hurt me to see a wonderful group of men that wasn’t able to finish school because of prejudice, so I wanted to see what I could do to help.”

Melissa applied for, and received, the Emily Menlow Marks Leadership Award. The award came with enough funding for Melissa to attend training on how to better serve the LGBTQ population, and pass that training on to her teachers. Since receiving the award she has worked to ensure that adult education students feel comfortable learning at Union Settlement, regardless of their gender or sexual identity.

Around the same time **Steven Portericker**, Director of Youth Services, was also beginning to see the need for increased sensitivity and more appropriate services. He received a flyer for a “Pride Prom” event for teens, but was reluctant to post it for fear of how

staff and students might react. He brought the topic of LGBTQ services up at a program directors meeting and realized that programs at Union Settlement largely neglected the issue of supporting the LGBTQ population. He surveyed the community and was troubled to learn that almost all East Harlem LGBTQ services are focused on HIV testing and support, none had comprehensive programs to offer social support to this population.

Steven was very alarmed by this realization because he knows that “young people need to feel safe and supported in their own community. They can’t go all the way to Chelsea to seek these services because it’s not their neighborhood and it’s not their peers.”

In the Spring of 2011 Union Settlement committed to addressing this need for services. An official network of 11 staff members from different Union Settlement departments assembled to create a “Safe Space Network”. The group strives to, “Promote an open, safe and aware community with respect to matters of gender and sexuality through education.”

The first public event of the network will take place next May. Sign up for our mailing list at www.unionsettlement.org/mailling-list to make sure you receive an invitation!

*Many thanks to **Jim Porçarelli** and **Richard Gerst** for supporting the work of the Safe Space Network and raising additional support from their friends and networks.*

Meals on Wheels

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grocery stores. This makes food insecurity among the most urgent concerns facing our senior community, causing many to choose between food and medical care.

For disabled and homebound seniors, the need is heightened. Over 50 percent of our seniors have reported the meals that we serve to be their sole meal of the day. On top of physical and economic constraints, many face loneliness and isolation, with friends and family gone from their circle and children living far away. Mr. Grant articulates, “We ask them how they are doing, I think they appreciate this more than the meals.”

“Often times, the Meals on Wheels person is the only person that they see for 3 or 4 days. That’s why it’s so important, not only that we are seeing them but monitoring their safety and well being,” explains **Jane Richardson**, Associate Director of Senior Services. The staff is careful to make sure that the same people see the same clients each day, and that they watch for signs of health deterioration.

Accompanying staff for a day as they make their deliveries, it becomes clear how much their clients mean to them. Carriers will often go above and beyond to make sure that the residents are well

taken care of, making trips to the corner store, and calling them on holidays. One of Mr. Grant’s clients calls him “son.”

For food safety reasons, Meals on Wheels carriers must make their deliveries within a two hour time frame. Unfortunately this leaves them little time to visit with the seniors that they serve. Volunteers with the time to call, to visit, and to spend time with our homebound and disabled seniors are greatly needed and appreciated.

*If you are interested in volunteering your time, please contact **Ari Briski** at abriski@unionsettlement.org or (646) 672-5086.*



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Donor Profile: Cummings Memorial Fund

Thanks to a \$20,000 grant from the Frances L. and Edwin L. Cummings Memorial Fund, Union Settlement is about to embark on a strategic planning initiative that will prepare us for current challenges and new opportunities for years to come.

Apart from local hospitals, Union Settlement is the largest employer in East Harlem, which means that Union Settlement’s health directly affects the health of the entire community. Yet we now face one of our most challenging funding environments and bruising government budget cuts at the same time as a heightened demand for services and a great need for evolving service delivery models. We have leadership that is eager to seize this moment and take a hard look at our agency and develop a new set of strategies to guide program development, build a solid financial foundation, and prepare for challenges that lie ahead. As a result, the agency’s Board and leadership has determined that now is the moment to engage in a strategic planning effort to overcome challenges and make the most of opportunities.

“I am very pleased to have this support from the Cumming Fund. This grant will allow us to create an invaluable blueprint for the future of the agency and chart our course to get there,” said **David Nocenti**, Executive Director.

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