



## Connecting Generations of Residents to Technology

Union Settlement has long been at the forefront of bridging the Digital Divide. As early as 1983 Union Settlement became home to the first community technology center when Antonia (“Toni”) Stone and her nonprofit, Playing To Win, opened the Harlem Computing Center in one of our facilities. Then in the early 1990’s, when the Clinton and Gore Administration called for “building ‘on-ramps’ to the information superhighway in underserved neighborhoods,” Union Settlement Board Chair **Maxine Rockoff** worked to equip and “wire-up” settlement houses across New York City. Union Settlement was able to open three computer labs in the late 1990’s, enabling us to offer computer classes to youth, adults and seniors. Over the past 20 years our Technology Department has grown from a single employee to a team of dedicated staff and interns, all working to keep Union Settlement staff and participants connected to technology resources.

Starting in 2011 Union Settlement launched a new technology education initiative, thanks largely to grants from the **Verizon Foundation**. **Tatiana Vertucci**, our Technology Education Coordinator, is building computer skills among our staff and program participants. Enhancing our computer education program has proven to be no small undertaking. Our computer labs were in need of attention and new equipment, and the interest in computer classes for our large staff and among community members was high.



Tatiana began by polling participants and staff on which classes were most needed and developed curricula on topics of interest. Technology and Development staff worked alongside her to ensure that our technology resources could keep pace with this growing interest in technology education. Thanks to Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) and Homework Helpers, both our Senior and Youth Centers’ computer labs have been upgraded in the past year, bringing 26 working computer stations into our community centers.

Over the past year Tatiana and technology volunteers have utilized these labs, in addition to a lab on East 104th Street, offering classes on Google Apps, Excel, typing, and computer basics to over 1,000 program participants and staff members. Volunteers play a key role in expanding technology education at Union Settlement. **Rafael Monge-Portaro**, a volunteer with a background in investment and finance, comes in to teach staff members the ins and outs of Microsoft Excel. **Luke Carlson** and **Rachel Brandise**, both current high school students, volunteer their Friday afternoons to supervise educational computer games for students ages 6-12. The students look forward to Friday afternoon; one student commented that, “Learning games on the computer is so fun, when the teacher asks you a question you get to know all the answers.”

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# A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Union Settlement:

Union Settlement's core mission is to create opportunities for the residents of East Harlem, and one of the most important ways that we do so is by providing the supportive services that allow local residents to succeed on their own. Two prime examples of this are our Early Childhood Education and Youth Services programs, which together provide educational and recreational care and services for hundreds of children every day. By providing these services, local parents can pursue and maintain employment, schooling and training, all in an effort to improve their lives and better support their families.



Unfortunately, child care and after school providers across New York City are facing significant reductions (or closure), because of dramatic decreases in the funding that the City is making available for these programs. Indeed, the Mayor's Executive Budget proposes to eliminate slots for more than 47,000 children in these programs, and is providing insufficient funding for the programs that will continue to provide these services.

Imagine that you are a single mother trying to raise your children while working full-time in a low-wage job – which is the reality for many mothers here in East Harlem. Having access to free or subsidized child care and after-school programs is crucial to your ability to remain employed. Now imagine that those programs disappeared, and your school-age children suddenly had nowhere to go after school, and there was no place for your pre-school children to be cared for while you worked. What choice would you have, other than to quit your job to take care of your children, and to move from being a taxpayer to a recipient of government aid?

Funding for child care and after-school programs is an investment – not just in the education and development of the children served, but also in the ability of parents to improve their lives and provide for their families. Union Settlement recognizes this, and that is why we are working hard with other children's advocates to urge New York City to restore funding for these crucial programs.

And you can help. See the information at the bottom of this page. Thank you for your support,

— David Nocenti

## FUNDING UPDATE: Early Childhood and Youth

In May, New York City announced its selections of agencies eligible to receive childcare contracts under the Administration for Children's Services' EarlyLearn NYC program, its restructuring of city-subsidized childcare. Fortunately, Union Settlement's longstanding Early Childhood Program, on which hundreds of East Harlem families rely, has been awarded funding to serve 420 children through our childcare/Head Start centers and 400 through our Family Child Care Network.

"We are also gaining a new center," said Director of Early Childhood Education Leida Rivera, pointing to Pequeños Souls Daycare Center on East 122nd Street, where we will be providing services beginning this fall. "We see such a powerful need among area families and we are so grateful to be able to continue to provide these vital services."

This funding is more critical than ever as the city's support of programs faces sharp decline. The EarlyLearn contracts are providing 6,500 fewer slots for the city's children, reflecting a 13

percent cut for subsidized child care.

Council Speaker Christine Quinn noted, "This reduction will have a devastating impact on the thousands of children and families who will no longer have access to vital early education opportunities and will be forced to scramble for alternative child care."

While Union Settlement was successful in its effort to expand its child care program, we have been adversely affected by other City funding cuts. In particular, a few weeks before the EarlyLearn funding was announced, Union Settlement learned that the City is dramatically cutting funding for our afterschool youth programs. If there are no restorations during the final budget negotiations between the Mayor and the New York City Council, Union Settlement will lose funding for afterschool services to 130 East Harlem children. Our elementary school program will lose all of its City funding and our middle school program will only be able to serve 120 youth, down from 150 this year.

***To learn more and find out about steps you can take to voice your support, visit [CampaignforChildrenNYC.com](http://CampaignforChildrenNYC.com), join our email list at [UnionSettlement.org/maillinglist](http://UnionSettlement.org/maillinglist) and follow @UnionSettlement on Twitter.***



Union Settlement's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**Ethnic Festival**  
Saturday, May 1<sup>st</sup>

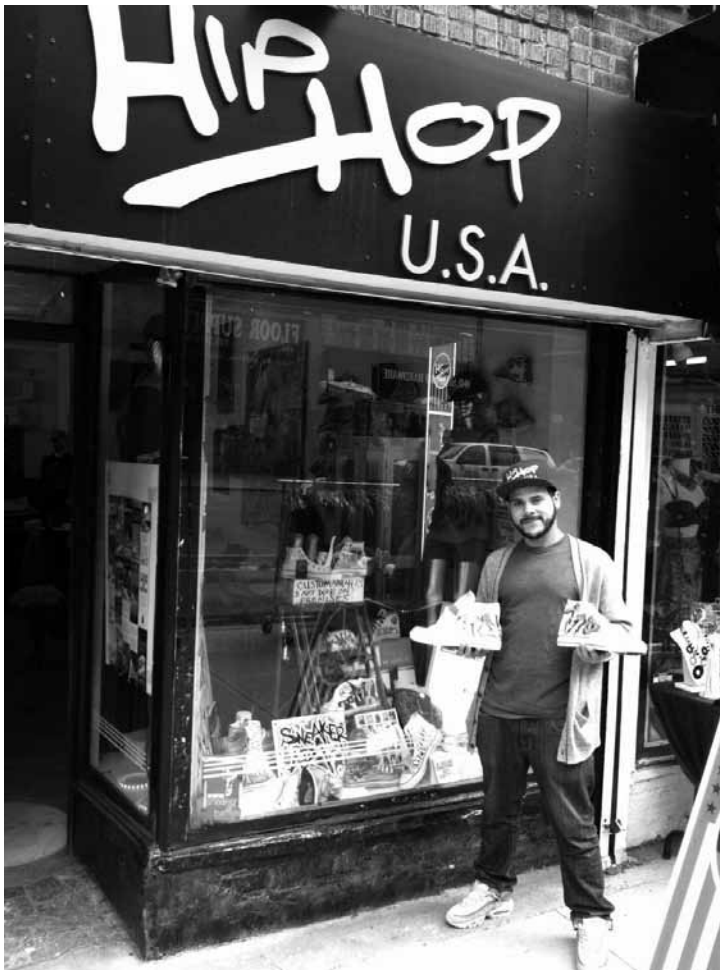
**Clockwise from upper left:**  
The Harambee Dance Company captivates audiences with a high-energy African-inspired performance; Chinese Lion Dancers scare away evil and bring luck; vendors along the street sell food, jewelry and art; volunteers arrive early to decorate the street; an entry in the Sneaker Art Battle, sponsored by Hip Hop USA; youth go head-to-head in the 3-on-3 basketball tournament.



Many thanks to our volunteer photographers Adam Cantor and Gina Pollack



# Working to Learn, Learning to Work



*Intern Ramon Feliciano at the Hip Hop USA store*

Union Settlement has always offered holistic educational services to the East Harlem community. Students in our Youth Service programs participate in activities that nourish their bodies and minds, including culinary and visual arts classes, diverse sports, dance and physical activities, and of course academics. We also provide teens with internships and workplace experiences. Young people at Union Settlement seek work experience by taking on 20-hour-a-week internships funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development. **Akiko Nishimura**, a Workforce Advocate, is one of several staff members who find summer internships that can build on students' specific interests. Akiko notes that one of the great strengths of the internship program is that it "opens students' eyes to skills they possess but weren't aware of, which gives them a sense of empowerment and encourages them to travel outside of their comfort zone."

Over the past year we have reached out to graduates of Union Settlement's high school programs to create an "alumni network." Members of the network who are currently in college have expressed a strong need for summer employment and internships. **Shannon Hughes**, the AmeriCorps VISTA member charged with

growing the network, is helping students locate and apply for internships. We look forward to some of the alumni returning to Union Settlement in June to work as Americorps VISTA Summer Associates.

Internships are also an important component of our Reconnect and Rise program for disconnected youth. These students face a number of obstacles to entering the workforce. Most have little experience, some have criminal backgrounds, and many have young children that require childcare. **Monique Thomas**, an employment specialist with the program, often places these young men in internships at Union Settlement as a means of introducing them to new opportunities and building their resumes.

Recently the Reconnect and Rise program has placed interns with Hip Hop USA, a company that sells custom designed sneakers and art from a gallery store in the East Village. **Ramon Feliciano** has worked at Hip Hop USA for almost two months, and speaks enthusiastically about his time there. "We sell customized art and provide ideas on what will sell to a younger generation. I've learned a lot, like how hard retail is and how to socialize with different kinds of people and not be shy."

We thank **Housing Works**, the **East Harlem Café**, and **Urban Garden Center** for joining our roster of internship sites. Our staff is working to expand and diversify the internship options that we can offer East Harlem students.

*If your workplace would like to host an intern, please contact Steven Portericker at [sportericker@unionsettlement.org](mailto:sportericker@unionsettlement.org) or (212) 828-6120.*

## Technology

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During her second year, Tatiana plans to expand the course roster to include more creative classes. Volunteers from Verizon will offer web design to our teenage students in the fall. Also, our Technology Department is working with teens in our CHOICES program, which offers youth an alternative to incarceration. For their latest project they are creating a song and a music video about the choices they make in their lives while learning Garage Band and Final Cut Pro. The students taking these classes learn to express themselves in new ways and find that their voice is listened to where it might not have been in the past.

*If you would like updates on Union Settlement's technology education program, "like" us on Facebook at [facebook.com/USATechnologyEducation](https://facebook.com/USATechnologyEducation). If you would like to volunteer please contact Ari Briski: [abriski@unionsettlement.org](mailto:abriski@unionsettlement.org) or (646) 672-5082.*

## Staff Spotlight: Maria Rodriguez



Born at home on East 100<sup>th</sup> Street, **Maria Rodriguez** has lived all of her life in East Harlem and has dedicated most of her professional life to Union Settlement Association.

“My first memory of the settlement is attending a performance as a little girl of 6 or 7,” explained Maria. “Later I took ballet classes here, learned arts and crafts and went to the summer camp upstate.”

While her father was a merchant seaman and didn’t learn to write his name until he retired, education for their children was her parents’ top priority. Her first language was English because her parents wanted their seven children to succeed in school.

The women in her family had to be strong because they ran their homes singlehandedly most of the time. Money was tight and they often lived on credit until her father’s ship came in. Maria’s mother, Pura, was a community leader and activist. She organized and went to Washington D.C. for legislative conferences organized by the settlement houses.

“I always felt that Union Settlements’ history of organizing on housing and education was impressive,” remembers Maria. In particular, she mentioned Nora Bowens, Manny Diaz, and Ruth Atkins as strong

community leaders at Union Settlement who led efforts to be sure East Harlem residents were heard and influenced decisions that affected their lives. She remembers past and present board members, staff and volunteers as wonderful individuals and is proud to have worked with them.

“Since my childhood, the Settlement has been a very special place for me,” said Maria. I will remain a passionate believer in the work of the Settlement. So my parting advice is – Keep up the good work or else!”

Maria was hired as the development assistant in 1971 and is now retiring more than 40 years later. We thank her for her decades of dedication and service to Union Settlement and East Harlem.

## Growing Community through Seeds for a Healthier Future

If you come to our main building at 237 East 104th Street, you may have spent time in *El Sitio Feliz*, Union Settlement’s large adjoining community garden. Maybe you sat under its wisteria-covered pavilion, gardened in its beds, played on its play structures, or attended an event in its courtyard. For its many uses, *El Sitio Feliz* is very special to our organization, serving as a spacious and therapeutic environment for our program participants, community members, and staff. We are excited to announce that *El Sitio* will be getting more care and attention than ever this spring and summer, and especially from East Harlem’s youth.

This spring a number of corporate groups have volunteered their time to get *El Sitio Feliz* ready for the growing season. Our thanks to **Banco Popular, Bryan Cave, LLP, Grow NYC, Manhattan Country School** and **Starbucks** for all of their help!

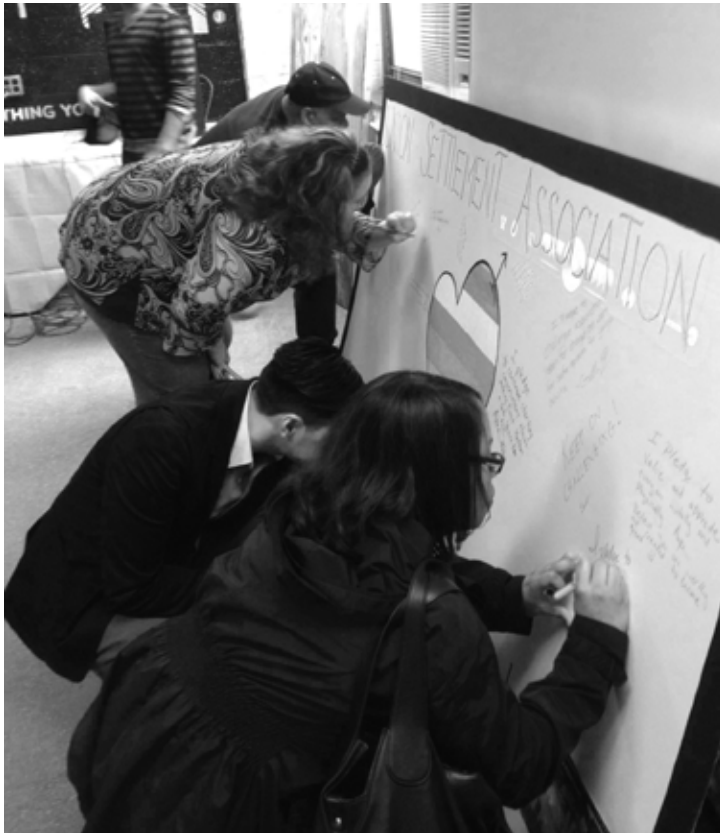
In the summertime, *El Sitio Feliz* will be transformed into an outdoor classroom. With funding from the Food Bank for New York City, Union Settlement will be implementing an exciting new sum-

mer program for 5-8 year old students called Seeds for a Healthier Future. This program will focus on many aspects of healthy living, from growing and preparing your own nutritious food to exercising and being environmentally conscious. Since March, our after-school students have planted vegetables, made garden observations, and discussed the purpose of soil and plant reproduction.

During the summer, children will care for their plants, explore specific plant species in depth, and learn about the food system. Students will help with composting, learning how to build a compost pile and creating signs to educate the organization about the importance of composting waste. The children will also visit local farmers markets, talk to local farmers, and learn how to make simple, cheap, and delicious meals fresh from the garden. These activities will be coupled with exercise and sports. Students will complete the program with the tools to lead healthy lives and with a closer relationship to food and the earth. If you’re in *El Barrio*, please stop by *El Sitio Feliz* to see the progress that the children are making!

# Union Settlement Celebrates the “Other Colors of East Harlem”

Union Settlement recently held an event focused on creating a safe space for members of the LGBTQ community. The Other Colors of East Harlem, a half-day conference, was the first event hosted by the Safe Space Network, a collection of staff working to make Union Settlement a more accepting and aware place for all participants, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.



“It’s something a lot of people don’t want to talk about, even though it’s there,” said **Jennifer Colton**, a Case Manager. “It’s really important to bring things out in the open and let people know there are resources for them and they don’t have to be alone and deal with issues all by themselves.”

The Other Colors of East Harlem was the Union Settlement’s Safe Space Network’s first attempt to begin providing those resources. The event, which took place the morning of May 5th, featured speeches, workshops, classes and a video premier. Speakers included New York City Council Member **Melissa Mark-Viverito** and **Edgar Yu**, Community Coordinator for the Manhattan District Attorney’s office.

The day began with breakfast, after which participants could choose from three sessions led by **Doreen Bermudez** from SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders), **Trevoy Ross** of Harlem United, and an art therapy workshop, led by Union Settlement’s Art Teacher, **Yvonne Lamar-Rogers**. “Ms. Lamar was really able to reach participants who might have been resistant to new ideas that day,” said **Victoria Saxe**, a social work intern at Union Settlement and Safe Space Network member.

“It was really exciting to get to be in a space where you see a participant have an ‘aha!’ moment, and realize something they hadn’t before,” said **Rebecca Steinfeld**, a psychotherapist at Union Settlement and a Safe Space Network member, about the class.

“The day also featured an exhibition of LGBTQ-themed art created by students from Harlem RBI, and two pieces from artist **Elizabeth Josephson**’s series on famous drag queens. Participants were encouraged to choose a piece of art that spoke to them, and then connect some of the lessons they had learned that day, to the message they saw in the artwork.

Lunch was served as the participants viewed the Safe Space Network’s video campaign, *We’re Making it Better Together*. The video was created in an effort to show participants why the Safe Space Network was started, what the Network will do moving forward, and how each participant in the campaign will pledge to personally make Union Settlement a more accepting and safe space. Participants were encouraged to end the day by signing their own pledge on a mural created by **Cynthia Medina**, Financial Data Intake Specialist (see photo at left).

“Some of the pledges included ‘using inclusive language’ and ‘discussing LGBTQ issues with my friends and family’,” said **Veronika LaRocque**, Safe Space Project Organizer.

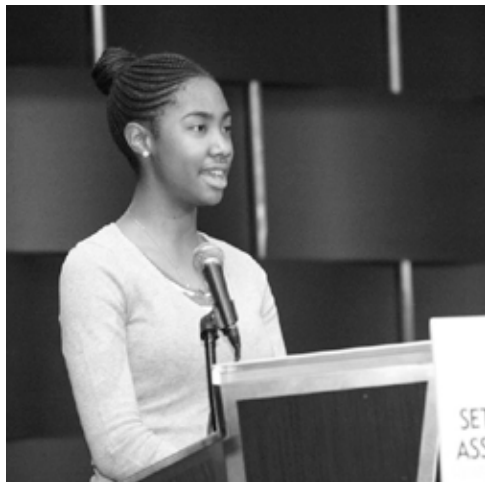
In the coming months, the Safe Space Network will be offering LGBTQ awareness and diversity trainings to staff, and will continue to offer programming to participants on a monthly basis.

“Just know that we’re working very hard to make sure there’s support and resources within East Harlem for everyone,” said **Steven Portericker**, Director of Youth Services, and a Safe Space Network Member. “We love you, we appreciate you and we want to make sure you know you are welcome through all our doors.”

**Sign up to Become a Volunteer at [unionsettlement.org/volunteer](http://unionsettlement.org/volunteer)**



# Union Settlement Association's 2012 Solutions Benefit



*Left to Right: Youth Services participant Tyrena Davis, Honoree Herbert Pardes, M.D., Honoree Maxine L. Rockoff, Ph.D.*

On May First, 350 friends and supporters came together to celebrate the work of Union Settlement and to recognize the leadership of two great New Yorkers: **Herbert Pardes, M.D.** and **Maxine L. Rockoff, Ph.D.**

Union Settlement was honored to have **Susan Sarandon** and **John Turturro** as Honorary Co-Chairs, Congressman **Charles Rangel** as presenter of its award to Dr. Pardes, Executive Vice-Chair, Board of Trustees of NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, and Manhattan Borough President **Scott Stringer** as a speaker. In addition to lauding Dr. Pardes' leadership in public health and medical education, Congressman Rangel spoke about the key role that Union Settlement plays in East Harlem.

"The families of East Harlem know and trust Union Settlement Association. They value and count on its work. To know Union Settlement is to want to support it because it makes such a difference in the community. I know this firsthand."

Maxine Rockoff was honored for her many contributions as Chair of the Board of Directors of Union Settlement, for her leadership bringing digital resources to underserved communities and for her decades of service to strengthen the settlement house movement. In her remarks she recognized the people who worked with her to wire up settlement houses across New York City in the 1990s, as well as the three past board chairs in the room as she prepared to step down and join their ranks. Happily, Dr. Rockoff will continue as a Union Settlement board member.

Dr. Rockoff said, "I hope you will recognize that the value of Union Settlement is not just to the individual participants, but to

their families and to the community – to the safety of the community, to the social capital in the community, to the wellness of the community, to the spirit of the community, to the willingness of people to help one another because they know each other, and they want and are in a safe neighborhood – makes the neighborhood a better place to live, and a better community in New York City."

In addition to our honorees, two participants in our youth and adult education programs addressed the audience. **John Williams** spoke about his life, how he dropped out of high school because he needed to work to help support his family. Now after twenty years out of school, he is studying for the GED at Union Settlement and striving to change his life for the better. **Tyrena Davis**, a high school senior, spoke about starting in Union Settlement's youth programs at the age of five and the crucial role we have played in her life over the last thirteen years. From dance classes and math tutoring to a very memorable pregnancy prevention workshop, to her first employment experience, and precious time with friends and counselors who helped her overcome her shyness and fears, Tyrena transformed herself during her years in Union Settlement's programs.

She closed her remarks by saying, "I truly want to thank Union Settlement for all of their support they have given me over the years. I will never forget about all of my accomplishments and the great people I met during my journey in the Youth at Union programs, being that I basically grew up here."

Union Settlement thanks everyone who contributed to the success of our Spring Benefit. This support enables us to create opportunity in East Harlem.



## Donor Profile: Lily Auchincloss Foundation

For each of the past three years the Lily Auchincloss Foundation has provided vital \$15,000 grants in support of one of our most critical programs, Reconnect and Rise, which serves “disconnected” youth who have dropped out of school and are not employed. The Auchincloss grant has supported case management services to these young men who struggle with a wide range of issues and need a support system as they work to establish a more stable life.

The successes of Reconnect and Rise are due in large part to the counseling and case management which our Auchincloss grant supports. The Case Manager is able to increase the impact of our language arts and math classes, work readiness services and internships that the program offers. For example, several of our participants were at risk of dropping out of the program, and the Case Manager was able to help them refocus their efforts. Now, they are back on track with both attendance and their participation.

“I am so glad that the Auchincloss Foundation has supported our work,” said **David Nocenti**, Executive Director. “They are a wonderful partner, and truly understand the needs of the youth in this program.”

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