



Union Settlement Responds to East Harlem Explosion

In the wake of tragedy, Union Settlement continues services and supports the community.

On March 12 a gas explosion on Park Avenue near East 116th Street destroyed two buildings and resulted in eight deaths and scores of injuries. This tragedy has deeply impacted the East Harlem community, and our hearts and thoughts turn in support to the loved ones of those who died or were injured in the explosion.

Union Settlement has been working with our neighbors and government leaders since the explosion occurred to respond and meet the needs of our community, and on March 16 was selected by the Mayor's Office as one of three non-profits to assist with outreach, referrals and assistance for victims of the disaster.

"This is a terrible tragedy that has deeply affected everyone in East Harlem," said **David Nocenti**, Executive Director of Union Settlement. "The entire community is working together to help the victims and their families, and Union Settlement is committed to continuing our efforts for as long as needed."

The impact of the explosion on those we serve was immediate. A number of our home-based childcare providers were located close to the explosion. They followed the procedures outlined in their emergency policies: immediately calling parents to inform them of their children's safety, and maintaining their composure and keeping the children calm, including those that needed to evacuate due to the smoke conditions in the area.

Union Settlement makes over 400 Meals on Wheels deliveries in East Harlem every day, and a number of our clients live within blocks of the explosion. A large area around the site was cordoned off by the emergency responders immediately following the explosion, and our Meals on Wheels staff members initially were unable to deliver those meals. However, we worked with NYPD



*The March 12 explosion at 1644 and 1646 Park Avenue
Photograph via Metropolitan Transportation Authority/Facebook*

and other emergency personnel and were able to gain access to the restricted zone in the afternoon and make the deliveries to those clients.

Duane Coleman was one of the staff who returned in the afternoon to ensure that the remaining homebound clients received their meals. "They were surprised because they thought we couldn't come," he says. "I went out because I wanted to give back. Just to see the smile on their face and to show them that there are people out there that care for them. We decided to bring two days of food just in case. I wanted to get the food to them by any means necessary. If it happened again, we'd do the same thing. I'd go back out."

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A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Union Settlement:

Union Settlement has been serving the East Harlem community for almost 120 years, offering programs and services designed to assist our neighbors, give them opportunities to learn and grow, and provide a helping hand whenever needed. Many thousands of East Harlem residents have accessed Union Settlement's services at some part in their lives, and our organization is deeply woven into the fabric of the community.

So when that fabric is torn – as it was by the terrible gas explosion and building collapses that occurred on March 12 – we feel the pain deeply. In an instant, eight individuals were killed, scores were injured, and many more were rendered homeless. Everyone in East Harlem knows someone directly impacted by this tragedy, and so the impact is felt by everyone.

Times like these test the strength of a community, and East Harlem is showing its strength. The entire neighborhood has come together like never before – from those rushing to the scene to help pull survivors from the rubble, to those offering shelter to those who lost their homes, to the many food and clothing drives that materialized nearly instantaneously, to the fundraisers that are still being held to provide financial assistance to the victims. Government agencies, elected officials, non-profits, local businesses, religious congregations and individual residents and families have simply asked: “How can we help?”

Recovery will be slow, and there clearly are trying times ahead. Many of the individuals affected by this tragedy had little to start with, and lost most or all of what they had. But East Harlem is a “community” in the best sense of the word, with neighbors helping neighbors in need, for as long as that need exists.

It is an honor and a privilege for Union Settlement to be part of this community, and we thank all of you for helping us to serve this great neighborhood.

— David Nocenti



Corporate Partner Spotlight: Axiom

Axiom, a 1,000-person new model of law firm located in downtown Manhattan, selected Union Settlement one of its two non-profit partners. **James Lynch**, an Axiom attorney and a member of our Board of Directors, made the connection between Union Settlement and the firm.

Volunteers from Axiom Engage, Axiom's initiative to leverage talent and resources to positively impact the community at large, hosted a Fall Festival on October 26 at Union Settlement with face painting, crafts, food, music and games, open to the East Harlem community. “That was the most fun to me,” says **Erin Payne**, Axiom Engage Co-Chair. “We had an incredible day and an incredible experience getting to know the community.”

Axiom's **Karl Dorwart** ran in the 2013 NYC Marathon as part of Union Settlement's charity team, and the firm also participated in our Thanksgiving food drive and holiday gift drive.

Axiom plans to host a series of sports clinics this spring at our Gaylord White Community Center, starting with a volleyball clinic for elementary school youth, and are planning a number of other projects for the upcoming months. When “Axiomites” get

together to work on a volunteer project, “everybody is passionate and enthusiastic. There are always volunteers across the board,” says Ms. Payne. “Ultimately we want to provide many ways to get involved... and people are stepping up right and left, asking if they can work on specific initiatives with Union Settlement.”



Axiom volunteers at the 2013 Fall Festival

East Harlem Explosion

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“Deliverers were persistent and really marvelous. The clients were really glad to see someone who had been out there to tell them that it was ok. The nearest thing to normal was getting their meal,” says **Jane Richardson**, Deputy Director of Senior Services.

Union Settlement’s Mental Health Services, whose main clinic is located just four blocks from the site, remained open and served both scheduled clients and those who asked for services that day. Our Mental Health staff members continue to coordinate with local government agencies and other service providers to ensure that mental health counseling is available to all those who need it.

It was especially important to provide such services to people who have had past traumas, as they often have greater difficulty in times of emergencies. One of our therapists has been working with a child who saw something disturbing that morning while walking by the explosion site. We hope this therapy will help alleviate the child’s fears and minimize the long-term emotional impact. Additionally, a therapist worked with a client whose friend was missing and couldn’t be reached, helping the client to process fear and manage emotions.

“My colleagues and I are working to ensure that those impacted by this tragedy can access counseling assistance and mental health services,” said **Linda Embry, LSCW**, Director of Mental Health Services. “Anyone seeking information about services, can call us at 212-828-6144.”

Many of our friends, family members and supporters have reached out to us in the past few days to offer their support, which we greatly appreciate. Thank you for your ongoing concern and supporting for Union Settlement and for the entire East Harlem community.



Duane Coleman and Louise Sutton delivered meals to homebound clients near the explosion site in the wake of the building collapse.

Individuals interested in assisting victims of the disaster can make a contribution to the East Harlem Building Collapse Relief Fund, established by the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City. Donations can be made online: www.nyc.gov/html/fund/html/donate/donate.shtml



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Foundation Profile: The New York Women’s Foundation

The New York Women’s Foundation supports Union Settlement’s job readiness program for people who want to start a career in health care by becoming a home health aide.

Many low income women and some men have benefited from the classes and have been successful in getting licensed. Once the students are licensed, they are essentially guaranteed employment as there is a high demand for home health aides in the New York area, in particular for aides who speak languages other than English.

“This grant is changing the lives of the women who complete

our course and go on to gain their HHA license,” said **Melissa Nieves**, Director of Adult Education.

The New York Women’s Foundation works to transform the conditions of poverty and their grants support programs that enable women to gain economic security, among other funding areas. In addition, the Foundation is an engaged partner to its grantees, offering wonderful opportunities for training, capacity building and connection to women working for change across the City. Union Settlement has begun a storytelling project with some of this support and staff have benefited from training opportunities.

“We are very pleased to be able to support Union Settlement’s job readiness services that enable low income women to rapidly secure employment,” said **Camille A. Emeagwali, M.S.**, Senior Program Officer. “This project is improving the lives of women and their families, and community members in East Harlem.”

Donor Spotlight: Emily Wilson Burns

Emily Wilson Burns grew up hearing about Union Settlement's programs, its staff and the East Harlem community. Her father, John H.T. Wilson, was a dedicated member of our Board of Directors and Advisory Council for over 40 years. In addition, he was a mentor to high school students in our programs who wanted to go to college; he recruited many friends and colleagues to volunteer and join our Board, and he gave generously of his time and financial support.

Union Settlement is a multigenerational organization that engages children, parents and grandparents to help them to build stable and successful lives. In addition to serving multiple generations within one family, we have also benefited greatly from supportive families for whom service to East Harlem is a tradition spanning generations.

One example is the family of John and Sandra Wilson and their children: Emily, Will, Tucker and David. Emily, along with her siblings, followed her father to Union Settlement. She has presented scholarships to students in our college readiness program in recent years and taken time to get to know the settlement personally. Emily even brought her son Ben, age 11, to visit us and he joined a circus arts class with children in our afterschool program, learning to juggle and more.

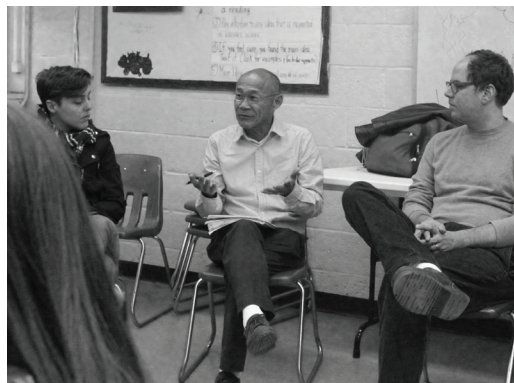
"The class was really entertaining and I learned a lot," said Ben Burns.

"I am pleased to carry on our family's support of Union Settlement," said Emily Wilson Burns. "The college readiness program helps students find new opportunities, and I enjoy meeting the students and hearing about their goals and dreams. My parents taught us the importance of service and of giving back, and I am proud to teach my children these same lessons."



Tucker Wilson, Samantha Williams, and Emily Wilson Burns at a College Readiness Awards Ceremony

LGBTQ Inclusivity: A Safe Space Forum



Kim Watson, David Kirby, and Don Kao led workshops for attendees

Our Safe Space Network, which promotes an openness, safety and awareness with respect to gender, sexuality and the LGBTQ community, held a forum on March 21. Community members and Union Settlement staff came together for an evening of workshops on topics such as Transgender 101, Creating Inclusive Spaces in the Workplace, and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Children. Attendees were enthusiastic about what they had learned in their workshops and shared their insights and feedback with the full group, which reconvened before closing the event.

For more information on the Safe Space Network, please visit www.unionsettlement.org/safespace

Participant experiences:

"One of our exercises involved each of us 'coming out' in the group. This generated so much connection and understanding. I left feeling very close to each of the participants."

"The workplace workshop showed us how much employees can make change at the office and in the community. I feel challenged to do more."

Mayor de Blasio Holds Press Conference at Union Settlement



Mayor de Blasio and Executive Director David Nocenti

On January 6, 2014, just his sixth day in office, **Mayor Bill de Blasio** and labor union leaders representing more than 1.3 million New Yorkers held a news conference at our Union Johnson Early Learning Center to announce the unions' support for Mayor de Blasio's proposal for free Universal Pre-Kindergarten and free afterschool programs for middle school children. The State has since rejected the Mayor's initial plan to fund these programs through tax increases to wealthy New Yorkers and instead plans to use current state revenues. (The State Legislature has not voted on this proposal as this article goes to press.)

The Mayor opened his remarks by highlighting the important role that Union Settlement Association and the settlement house movement play in New York City.

"I want to thank the Union Settlement Association. You know this settlement movement; I spoke about it at one of our previous press conferences. The settlement movement has changed the face of this city over the last hundred years and more. We walk in the footsteps of that movement. It was the settlement movement that really helped the people of this city understand what we had to do for our children, what we had to do for those who were less fortunate,

what we had to do to reform our society and make it more fair. It influenced fundamentally the people who became the change agents.

"The settlement movement has changed the face of this city over the last hundred years and more."

— Mayor de Blasio

"I was struck in my never-ending pursuit of knowledge a story I read for the first time in the book *City of Ambition* which is about the relationship between Franklin Roosevelt and LaGuardia that some people who would ultimately be key figures of the New Deal like Frances Perkins and Eleanor Roosevelt knew the settlement movement well, knew the Settlement Houses. Franklin Roosevelt did not and so one day, I think it was in 1911, Eleanor Roosevelt set up a date for Franklin Roosevelt to come pick her up and meet her somewhere and she made sure it was at a settlement house so he would actually have to experience something that his own personal upbringing had not taught him and it was, at least according to this rendition, a pivotal moment in his growth and development.

"So it's an honor to be in a settlement house because so much of the progressive history of this city, this state, this nation came out of this movement.

"I want to thank the Executive Director here, David Nocenti, for his excellent work. This particular organization has been open since 1895. It's focused on education, on health and wellness and community building programs for the people of East Harlem ever since.

"I'm now going to use math skills: that is 119 years since it's now 2014 and that's pretty extraordinary. And this center serves the people of the community from the youngest to the oldest. So here you will find Head Start and Pre-K and you'll also find Meals on Wheels, you'll find the whole range, and that's why this type of organization is so crucial to our city."

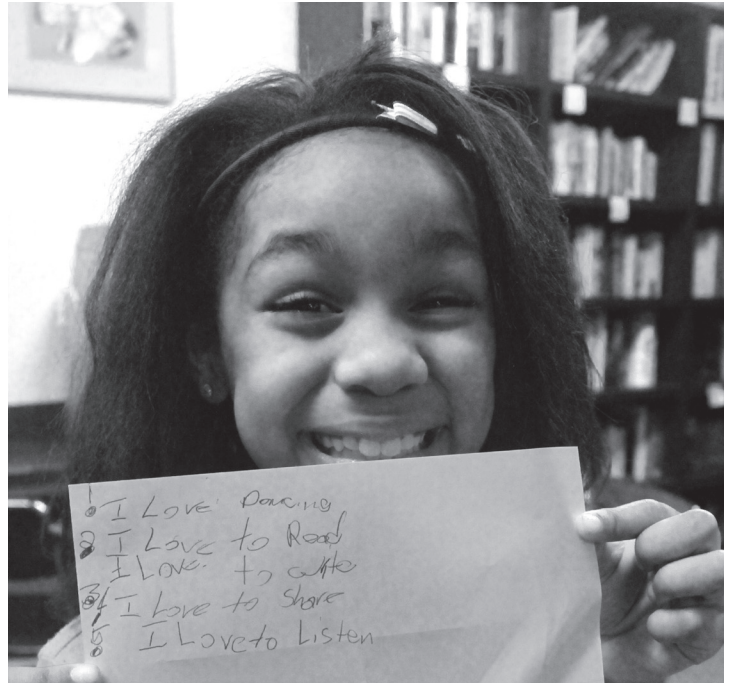
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New Initiatives to Develop East Harlem Leaders

Elementary, middle school and Adult Education students learn how to advocate for community needs through new civics classes

This spring, three of Union Settlement’s programs are piloting civics classes designed to engage participants in local advocacy, a core focus of the organization’s Policy and Advocacy program that was initiated last year. The curricula – targeting elementary, middle school, and adult education students – introduce participants to the structure, functions, and processes of our local government, and help them identify key community assets and needs and develop the leadership skills needed to advocate for them successfully.

Students in Youth Services’ Bridges middle school program are working toward the goal of providing free lunch to all New York City public school students as part of our participation in the city-wide Lunch 4 Learning campaign. Housed at Isaac Newton Middle School, the Bridges program provides academic and recreational



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Afterschool student Takira Jones shares what she loves about herself, listing traits and relating them to leaders’ qualities.



Staff Profile: Alina Kapustin

Each morning, **Alina Kapustin** travels from Brooklyn to Pequeños Souls Day Care on East 122nd Street. Although the commute is long, she can’t wait to arrive in her classroom. “Here at Pequeños Souls, we are like a family,” she says. “We are very close here, everybody helps here.”

Her favorite part of her role is seeing “the kids and their progress. I like the classroom feel. I want to make an impact on a whole classroom of kids.” The most rewarding part of working at Pequeños Souls is to see her students’ skills develop. Her dream is to see her students six years from now, still excited to see her and share their progress.

Prior to joining Union Settlement as a teacher in April 2013, Ms. Kapustin completed a degree in Speech Pathology, and she is currently working towards her Masters in Education and Special Education at Touro College. She discovered her love for working with children while working at Jumpstart, an early education organization helping preschool children develop language and literacy skills.

She is inspired by her family – her mother, aunt and younger brother. Her mother always told her to follow her dreams. “My aunt came here when she was 13 and carved a path for herself. I’m the same way. If I want it, I go and get it. And I want to be an inspiration for my younger brother.”

To parents, she says “You have to trust your teachers and know [your children] are in good hands. Ask questions and get to know the teachers.” And for future teachers, she says, “You have to love it. You’re in it for the long run. You come into it with an open mind... I believe everything happens for a reason. You’re here; you’re meant to be here for a reason. You’re meant to help someone.”

New Initiatives

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programming for students after school, and is now teaching student volunteers about food and school policy, thanks to generous support from the Levitt Foundation. The sixth, seventh, and eighth graders participating in Lunch 4 Learning workshops are working to understand the school lunch program in the context of food insecurity in East Harlem, and to engage their middle and high school peers in the school food conversation. Recently, students drafted and distributed surveys intended to gauge student attitudes toward school lunch and the stigma surrounding the free lunch program.

“We need to be more informed about why kids do and don’t eat school lunch,” said Alexis, a sixth grade participant in the Lunch 4 Learning workshop. “If we know, then we can tell our representatives why, and they can help change it for the better.”

Similar advocacy workshops have been adapted for other Youth Services and Adult Education students to encourage civic engagement across the organization. AmeriCorps VISTA **Shaqwanda Everett** facilitates a bi-weekly class offered as an

elective for children ages 7 to 10 in the Rising Stars program at Washington Houses Community Center, where students discuss what makes their East Harlem neighborhood a community, the parts of the community that are important to them, and the actions they can take to help strengthen it.

“I wanted the children to learn about the community, about the leaders in the community, and how to move towards effective change,” said Ms. Everett.

At the same time, Adult Education students working toward their High School Equivalency (HSE) degree are developing the skills they need to pass the state’s new HSE exam through civic engagement lessons and activities. For example, students practice essay writing on social issues they identify by drafting letters to their local representatives.

For many in the class, this helps to make the exam material personal and relevant, and gives them the opportunity to be advocates for Adult Education and the needs of their communities.

For more information about these and other community-based initiatives, contact Nina Dastur, Director of Policy and Advocacy at (646) 672-5047 or ndastur@unionsettlement.org.

update

Union Settlement welcomes new Board Members **Andrew Schwalm, Francesca Curtin, David Thomas** and **Susan Wiviott**.

update

Run the **2014 TCS New York City Marathon** for East Harlem on the Union Settlement Charity Team! For more information on how to get a guaranteed spot, contact Devin Seelman at dseelman@unionsettlement.org or (646) 672-5083.

update

Borough of Manhattan Community College is partnering with Union Settlement to provide Social Sciences and Human Services students with field experiences in human services. Ten students are interning as Homework Helpers, Conversation Partners for an English as a Second Language Class attended by Seniors, High School Equivalency Exam Tutors, and interning in our program for youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system.

update

Volunteers from the **New York Junior League** and **DesigNYC** are creating wonderful interior designs for our classrooms, bringing their designs to life by painting and redecorating. These classrooms are used by Adult Education students, youth in our after school programs, and the community.

update

The We Can Build It initiative, made possible by a grant from **Starbucks**, provides entrepreneurship workshops and community building activities to youth ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and out of work. Participants developed a community service project with a focus on hunger, and organized a food drive, collecting enough to provide bags of food for 50 families.

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