

THE

# UNION SETTLEMENT

CHRONICLE

## Local Entrepreneur Began Her Journey with Union Settlement

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*Yudelka Adorno, Adult Education program alumna and owner of Blue CoCo restaurant in East Harlem*

Spring 2015 • Volunteering & Community Building

## A Message from the Executive Director



Dear Friends of Union Settlement:

Union Settlement has a wonderful staff of full-time and part-time employees, working every day to serve the East Harlem community. Their efforts, as great as they are, do not tell the full story of our work, because we also have hundreds of volunteers and community partners helping Union Settlement fulfill its mission.

As you will read in these pages, this includes not just “traditional” volunteers who are giving their time and expertise to work with participants in our programs, but also the program participants themselves, who want to “give back” by helping their neighbors.

This spirit of community – neighbors helping neighbors – has been part of Union Settlement’s approach for the past 120 years. We are proud not because we are in the community, but because we are part of the community. Local East Harlem residents are our employees, volunteers, friends and neighbors, and they share in and support our work.

If you are interested in volunteering here at Union Settlement, please contact Catherine McGahan, our Volunteer Coordinator, at [cmcgahan@unionsettlement.org](mailto:cmcgahan@unionsettlement.org) or 646-672-5082. We would love have you become part of our family and work with us to build the vitality of East Harlem.

David Nocenti  
Executive Director

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*by the numbers*

**14,000** hours of volunteer service were completed last year by seniors who both participate in our programs and assist their neighbors.

# Listening to our Neighborhood

In 2014, Union Settlement, in partnership with the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, conducted an assessment of the services we provide and perceptions of community needs. 1,028 participants and parents of participants from all of our programs responded.

The survey primarily sought feedback on the quality of our programs. Overall, 97% of our program participants were either “always” or “usually” satisfied with our services, 95% indicated that our programs help them achieve their goals and 99% would recommend Union Settlement’s programs to someone else!

This survey also revealed East Harlem’s top concerns for community improvement. We asked respondents, “What issues are rated as most important in the East Harlem community?” and 35% ranked “improving our schools” as their most important concern, followed by



*A student in our educational programs for disconnected youth*

“creating more job opportunities” (16%) and “reducing crime” (14%).

Knowing that our programs are reaching our participants’ expectations is a wonderful success for us, and understanding the issues that are most important to our participants will help us design our programs to better meet their most pressing needs.

**485** people volunteered as part of corporate and community groups in 2014. These groups engaged the East Harlem community by conducting mock job interviews, beautifying our community garden and tutoring our youth.

**61** volunteers provided 5,040 hours of one-on-one literacy tutoring to 105 children ages 5-8 in six local public schools.

# Staff Spotlight: Thomas De Castro



**Thomas De Castro** is a man on a mission. He came to the United States from the Philippines in 2010 and started working with Union Settlement in our Metro North Early Childhood Education Center in 2011. Thomas continued to teach and has begun studying for a Masters degree in General and Special Education. His effort and strengths as an educator were recognized and in March 30, 2015, he be-

came the Educational Director of our Franklin Plaza Head Start Center, where nearly all the children are learning English as their second language.

Thomas is always thinking about the best ways to apply what he is learning to the real-world needs of his students and families. "As an educator in my heart, I am passionate and dedicated in ensuring that all children, regardless to their capacities, should experience high quality early childhood education," Thomas said.

"Parents need to be informed and empowered about the benefits of Pre-K," Thomas said. "Supporting their children's education at this stage of development will affect them for the rest of their lives."

Early childhood education is widely recognized as important for predicting future success. "I am trying to meet the educational, emotional, physical and social needs of each child," Thomas said. Challenging Union Settlement's teachers to think globally before teaching locally, Thomas is proactively working to meet the shifting paradigms in education.

## Union Washington Child Care Renovations Unveiled

On March 4, Union Settlement unveiled the newly renovated lobby of our Union Washington Child Care Center. The beautiful new space was accomplished thanks to the pro bono assistance of a wonderful group of companies. **Theodore Williams Construction Company** performed the renovations based on designs by **Lori Falk Interior Design** and **Living Hive Design**. New flooring, furni-

# Local Entrepreneur Began Her Journey with Union Settlement

**Yudelka Adorno**, entrepreneur and graduate of Union Settlement's adult education program, arrived in the U.S. about 15 years ago. Yudelka spoke no English and needed her sister's help filling out job applications and important documents. Wanting to turn things around, she said, "I was determined to help my daughter do her homework." Yudelka found Union Settlement through a friend and first enrolled in our English for Speakers of Other Languages and then High School Equivalency classes. "I had teachers who cared for me and made sure that I was learning and ready to take the test," Yudelka said about her time with Union Settlement.

"I was able to go to college after I passed my GED," Yudelka said. She went to BMCC and graduated with an associate's degree in liberal arts and then transferred to Baruch College, graduating with a degree in Political Science.

ture and brightly colored walls can be found throughout the space. The health and nutrition exhibit provided by the **Children's Museum of Manhattan** adds to the vibrant learning environment.



"I was able to go to college after I passed my GED."

-- Yudelka Adorno

Yudelka is considering applying to law school, and is studying to take the LSAT exam. She wants to help people with immigration matters.

On top of her academic pursuits, Yudelka is also a local business owner in East Harlem. She owns Blue CoCo, a restaurant focused on healthy food options and smoothies. "As a local business owner, I am providing a service that is really needed in the community," Yudelka said. "Every time I looked for something healthy to eat it was either not available or too expensive."



*Children from the Union Washington Child Care Center help David Nocenti, Shelby Johnson and Lori Falk cut the ribbon to re-open our newly renovated lobby.*

# Seniors Volunteer, Too

Often when people think of senior centers, they imagine older adults who are too sick to take care of their own needs. Not so in Union Settlement's four senior centers across East Harlem. There are adults at every level of health and mobility, who are encouraged to participate in myriad activities offered every week.

One such endeavor is our "Seniors United to Serve" volunteer program. Members of our

centers are given the opportunity to volunteer up to 20 hours a week. **Judehia Quiñones** coordinates about 80 senior volunteers each week. "They get personal satisfaction knowing they help people," Judehia said. "They want to matter and affect people's lives for the better."

Volunteers can be found assisting in packing meals and sandwiches, planning activities for their centers, organizing trips and leading exercise programs. Mary, who at 93 years old is our oldest volunteer, loves to organize monthly birthday parties and help in the kitchen. Volunteers also serve the East Harlem community as friendly visitors, spending time with our most vulnerable population, homebound seniors.



*Senior volunteers at our annual Volunteer Recognition party*

# A Special Thank You to our VISTA Volunteers



Union Settlement says goodbye to our latest group of AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers: **Leah Kelemen, Rokiadou Coulibaly, and Viannie Bell**. VISTA members give one year of service focused on building capacity to organizations that serve low-income communities.

Leah worked in Adult Education, creating curricula for High School Equivalency classes and developing computer literacy tools and instructional materials to support the transition to computer-based equivalency exams. Rokiadou worked with elementary school children in our Youth Program, where she increased the volunteer base of Homework Helpers and organized parent engagement workshops and special programs. Viannie worked in the Early Childhood Education programs, creating tools to guide parents through the transition to public elementary school. We thank our VISTAs for their hard work and dedication!

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Union Settlement welcomes  
new board member **Robert  
V. Edgar, Vice President for  
Donor Relations at the New  
York Community Trust.**

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