

THE NEW YORK  
COMMUNITY TRUST



UNION  
SETTLEMENT

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**THE NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST AWARDS  
GRANT OF \$441,000 TO UNION SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATION**

***The Trust's Brooke Astor Fund for New York City Education Grant will Expand Literacy Program for East Harlem Elementary School Students Who Speak Spanish in the Home***

NEW YORK, NY – [Union Settlement Association](#) today announced the award of a \$441,000 grant from [The New York Community Trust](#). This single-year grant will support expansion of a high-impact literacy curriculum, *Photos and Me*, for elementary school children whose families speak a language other than English in the home. The grant is made from The Trust's Brooke Astor Fund for New York City Education.

*Photos and Me* combines photography and oral storytelling with nonfiction reading and writing. Children write informational texts inspired by their photos and videos of their neighborhoods, families, friends, and homes. The program helps bilingual children to improve their English language comprehension, learn academic vocabulary, and cultivate critical perspectives.

With this grant, Union Settlement will significantly expand the reach of this project to include nine local public schools as well as Union Settlement's afterschool program at the Washington Houses Community Center. During the first year, *Photos and Me* was piloted with children in 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grades. Year one data showed that third graders in the *Photos and Me* program made five times more progress than a control group. In addition, student performance on standardized literacy tests and other measures of higher order reading skills showed overall growth in all participating grade levels.

This curriculum addresses the gap between methods of literacy instruction used in schools and the experiences of linguistically and culturally diverse students, to benefit the 12% of students in East Harlem who are English Language Learners. It will also strengthen the capacity of East Harlem teachers, parents, and schools to help children meet or exceed literacy standards in elementary school and beyond.

Last year Union Settlement received a pilot grant from The Trust for the program, which was created in partnership with Teacher's College of Columbia University. The curriculum was developed by María Paula Ghiso and Patricia Martínez-Álvarez, assistant professors, researchers and experts in bilingual education and literacy at Teachers College.

"This has been a great partnership between Union Settlement and the Teacher's College faculty members, and we were delighted to see the amazing progress the children made during the first year," said David Nocenti, Executive Director of Union Settlement. "Our hope is that the

program will serve as a model intervention to improve the literacy skills of English Language Learners and bilingual children throughout New York City.”

“Brooke Astor loved literacy and wanted every New Yorker to be able to read and write. We’re honoring her legacy by supporting promising programs that take a fresh look at how we can improve the reading skills of disadvantaged students in high-poverty schools,” said Shawn Morehead, Senior Program Officer for Education at The New York Community Trust. “We were impressed by the results of the pilot program and hope its expansion will be equally successful.”

“The *Photos and Me* curriculum supports English Language Learners in using their own rich cultural experiences as a platform for reading and writing,” said María Paula Ghiso, Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at Teachers College. Patricia Martínez-Álvarez, Assistant Professor in Bilingual Education, adds, “The program builds on bilingual children’s language resources as assets for expanding their English language repertoires, while at the same time recognizing the value of maintaining and enhancing one’s home language and culture.”

*The Photos and Me* program is built around activities which naturally include parents at home and in school, enabling parents to help their children’s literacy development, even those whose first language is not English. For example, children interview parents on their perspectives of injustice, and get their help constructing a community map. This helps students learn about their immigration histories and the riches of their neighborhood.

Classroom teachers using *Photos and Me* learn how to better connect instruction of higher order reading skills with their students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In turn, these teachers take a leadership role within their schools in sharing best practices in order to leverage the creative potential of the *Photos and Me* curriculum to support city students in the development of reading skills.

### **About Union Settlement Association**

Union Settlement Association is an on-the-ground resource for East Harlem residents of all ages, and a passionate advocate for the needs of underserved communities. Since opening our doors in 1895, we have brought education, wellness and community-building programs to our neighborhood, empowering New Yorkers with opportunities to better their lives. With a staff of more than 350 and services that impact 10,000 people, Union Settlement is building the vitality and success of East Harlem. For more information, please visit [unionsettlement.org](http://unionsettlement.org).

### **About The New York Community Trust**

Since 1924, The New York Community Trust has been the home of charitable New Yorkers who share a passion for the City and its suburbs—and who are committed to improving them. The Trust supports an array of effective nonprofits that help make the City a vital and secure place to live, learn, work, and play, while building permanent resources for the future. The New York Community Trust ended 2014 with assets of nearly \$2.6 billion in more than 2,000 charitable funds, and made grants totaling \$158 million. The Trust welcomes new donors. Information at [nycommunitytrust.org](http://nycommunitytrust.org).

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