

UNION

SETTLEMENT

CHRONICLE

WINTER 2018

Making East Harlem Fierce

Find out how **your support** helps Union Settlement grow small businesses.

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Career Academy
Giving unemployed youth the tools they need to enter the workforce.
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UNION SETTLEMENT CHRONICLE

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Union Settlement 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 over 450 and services that impact **10,000** people, Union Settlement is building the vitality and success of East Harlem.

Executive Director
David Nocenti

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Tax cuts could mean spending cuts to vital services in East Harlem



David Nocenti
Executive Director

 @davidnocenti

Our founders were not rich, but they were financially better off than those they were serving, and **they knew that the best way to have a positive impact was to “settle” into this community, work side-by-side with the residents, and learn from them about their needs and goals.**

Union Settlement was founded in 1895 by a group of individuals who were dedicated to helping some of the poorest individuals in New York – the largely German and Irish immigrants living in squalid tenement conditions in East Harlem.

Our founders were not rich, but they were financially better off than those they were serving, and they knew that the best way to have a positive impact was to “settle” into this community, work side-by-side with the residents, and learn from them about their needs and goals.

I found myself thinking about Union Settlement’s origins – and the “settlement house” approach to problems – more and more as I watched the debates in the weeks leading up to the passage of the federal tax cut bill in December.

At that time, almost all of the discussion focused on how much of the \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts would go to each of three groups – the rich, the middle class and the poor – but **there was almost no discussion of where the government would be cutting spending to offset the revenue reductions.**



Medicaid? Head Start? Immigrant assistance? Labor law enforcement? Environmental protections? No discussion at all.

Even more fundamentally, **at this time of tremendous wealth inequality, tax cuts themselves are treated as a solution that will somehow address the needs of the populace, with no focus on working side-by-side to learn more about the problems that exist, and developing cooperative approaches that work.**

This newsletter will reach you in February, but I am writing this piece on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. As Dr. King said:

“An individual has not started living fully until they can rise above the narrow confines of individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of humanity.”

Thank you for rising above your own individual concerns, and joining with Union Settlement to address the broader needs of our underserved neighbors here in East Harlem.

— David Nocenti

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Your gift makes
dreams a reality.
Here's how.
Meet Guadalupe.



Guadalupe Castro

Owner of Fierce Spa in East Harlem and a
Business Development Center Participant

“The Business
Development
Center is my home.
They're a part of
the neighborhood.
I always go back
there, and they
always guide me.”

Guadalupe Castro moved to New York from Mexico 20 years ago. As a single mother, she came with the goal of landing a lucrative job in her industry, and making enough money to return to Mexico and support her daughter. However, **as an immigrant woman, she found working in New York more difficult than she imagined.**

“I was a fashion designer in Mexico and thought I could get work designing here. I soon realized how difficult that would be because I did not speak much English, and I did not have the necessary contacts in the industry. My first job was in a factory in Brooklyn sewing clothes instead of designing them.”

Guadalupe next took a job at a nail salon. She found that she had a talent for painting and creating intricate designs on nails. She continued to learn more about the nail salon industry while spending her free time perfecting her English.

After 10 years of working for other salons, it was time to start her own.

However, **Guadalupe needed help with the basic development and creation of her business:** financial assistance, business counseling and technology assistance. **Luckily, Union Settlement's Business Development Center (BDC) was there to help.** She said, “By attending classes offered at the BDC, I learned the basics of creating and maintaining a successful business.”



In 2010, Ms. Castro opened her own salon, Fierce Spa in East Harlem. Recently, she expanded her business, doubled its size and moved it to its current location on First Avenue between 115th and 116th Streets.

Guadalupe believes in giving back to her community. She is a founding member of the El Barrio Mexican Chamber of Commerce, has participated in the East Harlem Mexican Independence Day celebration and recently hosted a domestic violence workshop in conjunction with the BDC and the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, which provided nail and salon workers with resourceful information they can pass on to any clients they believe might be victims of domestic violence.

Guadalupe continues visiting Union Settlement's BDC for counseling and technical assistance. “The Business Development Center is my home. They're a part of the neighborhood. I always go back there and they always guide me. If I have an idea and don't know how to make it a reality, I go there and they help me.”

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Starting a new business can be daunting

Union Settlement's Business Development Center is here to help



“We are taking our business knowledge straight to the community!”

Edwin Nieves, *Senior Director of Business Development*

“**S**tarting a business is a daunting challenge, especially if you are an immigrant woman in a low-income neighborhood like East Harlem,” says Edwin Nieves, Senior Director of Union Settlement’s Business Development Center (BDC). “But with the help of our Business Development Center, over **200 entrepreneurs and business owners** in the community—**78% of whom were women**—received business education, technology training and technical assistance last year.”

With a mission to enhance the economy and commerce of East Harlem and help entrepreneurs and small businesses succeed, **our BDC supports individuals who already have an existing business, or those first starting their own businesses.**

“**Many entrepreneurs have a dream of creating and owning their own businesses, but they don’t realize everything they need to learn.** Luckily, our bilingual staff is there to help them,” said Edwin. “**We welcome everyone here:** those who didn’t graduate high school, as well as those who hold an MBA.”

BDC’s free or low-cost business classes give our participants the knowledge necessary not just to succeed, but also thrive. Our 54-hour core program, BusinessWise, open to all aspiring entrepreneurs, teaches the “soup to nuts” of starting and maintaining a business, including corporate structure, legal obligations, budgets and business plans.

“Because so many of our participants are women, and thanks to funding from the New York Women’s Foundation, we created a free year-long program just for women,” said Edwin. The Women’s Entrepreneurial Success Training (WEST) offers business training, technology classes and assistance, workshops and counseling for women entrepreneurs.

The program educates women about business practices, from both the theoretical and practical points of view, informs them about available resources and provides them with one-to-one mentoring on issues extending beyond business to the reality of work/personal-life relations.

Recently the BDC has become more proactive. We are taking our business knowledge straight to the community and holding many events within community business-

es through our NYC Department of Small Business Services-funded **East Harlem 360°** initiative: from merchant meetings, to business workshops to networking events.

“We also have a **Buy Local East Harlem Initiative** funded by Citi Community Development, where we connect East Harlem’s anchor institutions—like Mount Sinai and New York Academy of Medicine—to East Harlem’s small businesses.” **We want to ensure that local businesses keep their purchasing within the neighborhood,**” explained Edwin.

In 2017...

200 entrepreneurs and business owners

received business education, technology training and technical assistance through our Business Development Center.



78%
were women.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Megan Abbott

From Union Settlement employee to crime novelist and screenwriter – and continuing supporter



“I saw the people of East Harlem strive to make their lives better for their families.”

We had an opportunity to interview **Megan Abbott**, a longtime donor and former employee of Union Settlement, who is the author of eight crime novels—including *You Will Know Me*, *Dare Me* and *The Fever*—and is currently a staff writer on HBO’s new hit show, *The Deuce*.

Megan wrote her first book while she was employed at Union Settlement and left to write a screenplay based on one of her novels. Her most recent book, *You Will Know Me*, was chosen as one of the Best Books of 2016 by NPR, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Boston Globe*, *Time Out New York*, *The Washington Post*, Google, *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*. Megan’s next book, *Give Me Your Hand*, will be out this summer.

UNION SETTLEMENT: Tell us about how you first learned about Union Settlement?

MEGAN ABBOTT: I responded to a *New York Times* job ad in, I think, 2002 and I count myself lucky that I did! I came on as a grant writer and eventually became the Director of Grants and Contracts. I worked at Union Settlement for a decade and though many things changed, the constants were the mission, the warmth and generosity of the staff and directors, and the great energy of East Harlem.

US: What are some of your favorite memories of working here?

MA: Oh, boy, I always loved the Day of the Dead celebration—the glorious costumes, the dances, the mariachi music, of course. I loved working with so many of the great program directors. Too many to count! And both [former Executive Director] Ellen Simon and David Nocenti were very inspiring to me. Their passion and commitment were contagious!

US: What inspired you about Union Settlement?

MA: I saw every day how tirelessly the staff worked to make things happen to improve conditions and to build community with the program participants. I saw the people in East Harlem strive to make their lives better for their families. **I also saw that not one single dime was wasted by the organization and that everything mattered.**

US: Why do you feel connected to our mission?

MA: Because I’ve seen it in action thousands of times—from the kids in the Early Childhood Education centers learning their numbers, all the way up to the participants in the senior programs taking computer classes. The vibrant immigrant populations of East Harlem are sharing their heritages, and building rich, positive lives in the community.

US: Anything else you want to share with us?

MA: Only that I always smile when I receive the newsletters or updates. I love seeing the life and energy and dynamism there. **I’ll always support Union Settlement—it’ll be lodged in my heart forever!**



Union Settlement, in partnership with House of SpeakEasy, recently handed out free books to young participants.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

East Harlem's unemployed youth face significant barriers in today's job market

Career Academy gives them the tools to compete



Union Settlement's Career Academy serves young adults aged 17-24 who are neither working nor in school. The Academy helps individuals with poor work histories and other complex barriers to employment (such as criminal justice system involvement and housing instability) improve their ability to competitively enter and remain in the workforce. This is accomplished through a series of workshops covering essential job search and life skills, mock interviews, individual counseling, job placement assistance and follow-up retention services.

Established in 2013 with funding from Robin Hood, Career Academy continues to grow through new and stronger partnerships with employers, service providers and educators. We are building programs that are responsive to the labor market and are giving our young adults the skills, training and certifications that today's employers demand.

“A huge reason our program is so successful is that we take a ‘meet them where they are’ approach to build a solid rapport that allows for positive relationships, which leads to better understood and informed career research and preparation for our young adults,” says Daniel Agosto, Program Director for Career Academy.

He added, “While I’m always proud that our participants do all they can to enter into and successfully complete our programming, **I’m most proud when they bring close friends and family to enroll in our workforce development program** and remark on how we helped them in ways others didn’t or when they say, ‘They actually care about you here.’ For me, that’s a true mark of success.”

Since 2013, Career Academy has provided services and training to over **750** of East Harlem's young adults, placing over **340** of them in jobs.

Want to volunteer?

We are currently looking for volunteers from the professional world to conduct mock interviews with our participants.

If interested, please email: volunteers@unionsettlement.org.



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WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2018