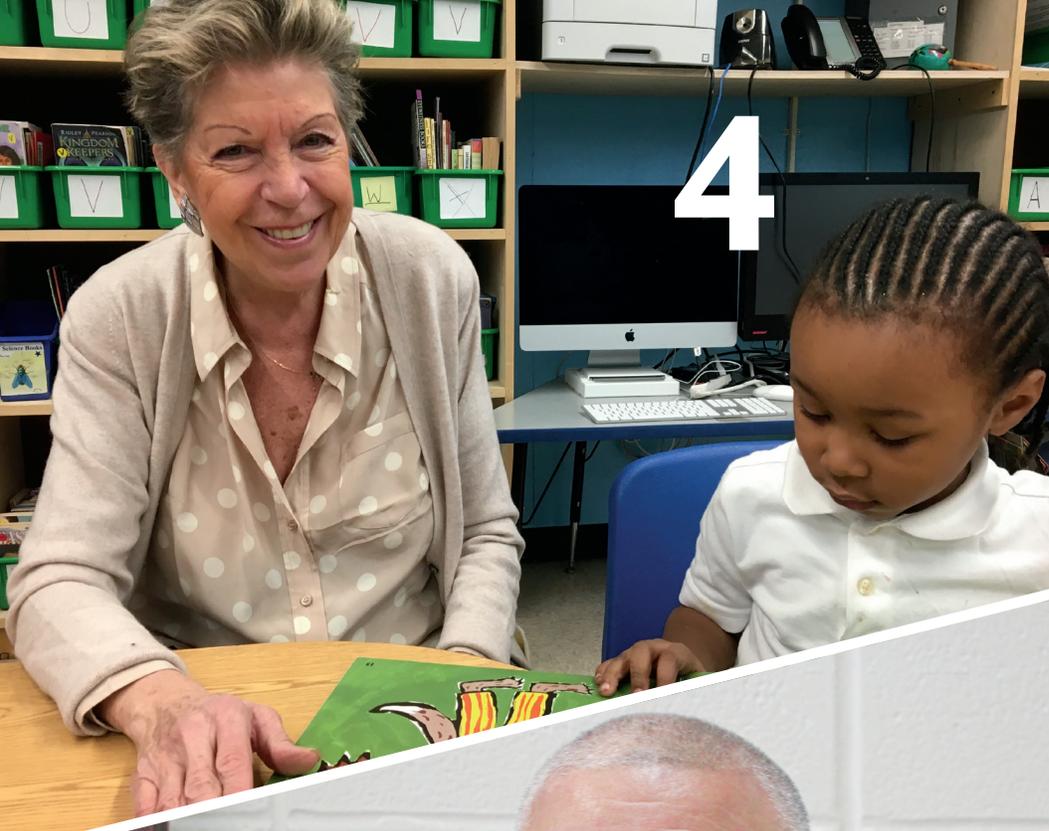


**UNION**  
**SETTLEMENT**  
CHRONICLE  
WINTER 2019



# 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

**Union Settlement**  
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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our multi- and cross-generational approach benefits every age group.



**David Nocenti**  
Executive Director

 @davidnocenti

**Our work is not just multi-generational, it is cross-generational as well.** We do more than simply offer separate services to local residents of different ages – **we work hard to bring those groups together**, in ways that enhance the lives of everyone involved.

**U**nion Settlement’s multi-generational services are one of the key hallmarks of our model of helping families here in East Harlem. **Our programs span the entire cycle of life**, from early childhood education, to youth services, to adult education, to senior services.

But our work is not just multi-generational; it is cross-generational as well. We do more than simply offer separate services to local residents of different ages – we work hard to bring those groups together, in ways that enhance the lives of everyone involved.

**Our 2019 Spring Benefit is appropriately themed “Celebrating Generations,”** and this newsletter highlights this important aspect of our programming. In particular, you will read about our Intergenerational Tutoring Program, which matches older adults with elementary school children who are struggling to read.

The educational results are remarkable, but so are the bonds that this program creates. **The individuals being connected are not family members, teachers or friends, but simply two members of a community at very different stages in life, spending meaningful time working together towards a common goal.** And the sense of pride and accomplishment felt by both the children and the senior volunteers is just as impactful as the educational gains.



We see these cross-generational connections throughout our programs — young professionals volunteering at a birthday party at one of our senior centers; corporate employees conducting résumé reviews and mock interviews with the 17- to 24-year-old-participants in our Career Academy program; and people of all ages helping deliver meals to homebound East Harlem seniors through our Meals on Wheels program. In each case, the **volunteers take time from their busy days to enrich the lives of complete strangers in an entirely different age group**, and they come away finding themselves even more enriched from the experience.

We did not invent this cross-generational approach, but we have been utilizing it for almost 125 years. And it works. **Think of your own family, and how involved grandparents and parents and aunts and uncles and children are in each other’s lives, and how everyone benefits as a result.**

This same ingredient is what makes our Union Settlement family so close and so successful, and it is why we are so thankful that all of you are part of this extended family.

—David Nocenti

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

# Your support brings generations together. Here's how.



**Kyra Giles**  
Program Director for the  
Intergenerational Tutoring Program

“Through this program, I’m able to train and support older adults who have the time and dedication to come in and be reading buddies with elementary school children.”



With so much overcrowding in our public elementary school classrooms, **some kids just need a little one-on-one time with a mentor to help them build confidence** when they’re struggling in class,” says Kyra Giles, Program Director for our volunteer-based Intergenerational Tutoring Program.

“Through this program, I’m able to train and support older adults who have the time and dedication to come in and be reading buddies with elementary school children in kindergarten through third grade. These students are really just developing their vocabulary and their reading skills, and they have been identified by their teachers as needing a little extra support to become great readers and thinkers and writers.”

**Kindergarten through third grade is a critical age for literacy development,** since studies have shown that a student’s success in reading throughout their academic career is largely determined by fourth grade. And, the students are not the only ones receiving benefits from the program. The older adults who volunteer their time to be a mentor for the entire school year find it very rewarding.

“These mentors receive the satisfaction of helping a neighbor, a student, the school, and contributing to the community in a positive way. They get

to go on that journey with a single young person. They begin by meeting a student who wants to read a book, but feels that they will not be able to do so with ease, based on their classroom experience. But **after several one-on-one visits as their reading buddy, the mentors begin to see these students running toward them with a smile, ready and willing to try to read.**”

In our most recent evaluation of the program, teachers reported that **80% of students showed improvement in their attitudes towards reading/ language arts, and 86% showed improvement in academic performance and participation in class.** School principals found the program to be a positive addition to their school, and they all requested more tutors, citing the progress students in the program had made.

“One of our mentor and student pairs actually ended up continuing their reading sessions throughout the summer on their own accord. They met weekly at the local library,” said Kyra.

If you have the ability to visit an elementary school in East Harlem once a week and are interested in mentoring a child, contact Kyra at:  
**[kgiles@unionsettlement.org](mailto:kgiles@unionsettlement.org)**.



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

# Gil Agosto knows all about growing up in East Harlem.

Union Settlement's Youth Services Director talks about the neighborhood over the years and what the future looks like for our community's young people.



**“Here, we provide a safe outlet to explore...”**

Gil Agosto, *Director of Youth Services*

**I**n an interesting twist of fate, Gilberto (Gil) Agosto, Director of Union Settlement's Youth Services Program, grew up in the very same housing complex that now headquarters our Youth Services program — and where Gil's office is located today!

“When I grew up in these public housing units, they were brand new and sparkling clean,” recalls Gil. “Back then, doors were open and young people could freely travel from one housing complex to another.”

Today, things are different. “Nowadays, the housing complexes have become more territorial, and **there is a danger to our kids of traveling across the street to another housing complex due to the possibility of violent reprisal** for encroaching on someone else's turf. This is just one of the circumstances our young people face on a daily basis.”

**Union Settlement's Youth Services is a safe space for our kids.** Our program welcomes all young people from the neighborhood and offers them opportunities they might not find at home or in school. Here, we provide a safe outlet for them to explore the arts, technology, career building, higher education and social skills. “Sometimes these young men and women just simply aren't aware of the opportunities that are out there for them,” Gil explains.

We offer such opportunities to approximately 3,000 youth each year. This includes afterschool as well as summer programs for elementary, middle and high school students, and those who are not in school.

Some of these young people understandably bring a lot of their stress, fear, and at times trauma, to us. Since taking on the role of Director of Youth Services 18 months ago, Gil has implemented what he calls “a change in mindset.”

**“I don't believe that young men and women should be punished. They should be given an opportunity to redeem themselves for any transgressions.** I've worked with schools where suspensions were a way of life — and I just don't believe that method is effective.”

“What I've done at Union Settlement is work with my team to look at innovative ways to implement consequential learning. **Our first course of action should not be removal from the program.** A young person might be removed from the specific activity, given a chance to calm down, given a chance to bring that energy down, and then have a conversation about what took place. Nine times out of ten, the core issue is one of a million things other than what you think it is.”

“I always tell my team, **‘we are not raising children; we are raising adults. These kids are adults in training.’** So, what kind of adult do you want to train? Do you want to train an adult who will quickly resort to quitting or punishment when dealing with transgressions? Or do you want them to take a step back and evaluate, and find ways to solve the problem so they can continue contributing to society?”

Any young person in the East Harlem community who is looking for a place — free of charge — to begin that training, regardless of the environment they're growing up in, will find a place of hope with Gil and Union Settlement's Youth Services program.



**SPECIAL THANK YOU**  
**Laura Johnson**

After over 40 years of service to Union Settlement, Laura Johnson bids farewell.



**“There are so many wonderful memories...”**

Shortly before she retired, Laura Johnson sat down with us to discuss her career at Union Settlement and her plans for the future. We all miss her, but wish her the best of luck in the future!

**Where did you grow up/go to school?**

I was born and raised in East Harlem and lived in the James Weldon Johnson Houses (a New York City Housing Authority development) until 1963. My family then moved to the South Bronx, and I stayed in the Bronx until I moved to New Jersey in 1990.

I got married right after high school and attended Bronx Community College at night and then Lehman College.

**When did you begin to work for Union Settlement?**

I started at Union Settlement in March of 1972. My niece was starting at Leggett, one of Union Settlement's early childhood education centers. The center and staff were wonderful, and I inquired about a job opening. I was actually interested in working in the classroom, but when the educational director reviewed my application and saw that my background was in finance, she offered me a part-time assistant bookkeeper position there.

As an assistant bookkeeper, I prepared payroll, ordered supplies, maintained time and leave records, arranged for substitute workers to replace sick or vacationing staff, and prepared reports for the Administration for Children's Services and food reports for USDA.

**What other positions did you hold at Union Settlement?**

After working at Leggett as an assistant bookkeeper, I moved into an accounting position in the finance department. I remained in Finance for several years. Then I left Union Settlement for two years and went to work for State Community Aids, an advocacy organization. I returned to Union Settlement as the Assistant Controller and then served as Director of Finance from 1996-97. Later, I became Deputy Director of Finance and Operations and in 2001, I became Associate Executive Director of Union Settlement.

**How have you witnessed East Harlem change?**

There has been a change in affordable housing within the community. More upscale housing has been developed, along with eateries. However, for the community that Union Settlement serves, the basic needs still exist: residents need child care, mental health services, afterschool services, and senior care. These services cut through social and economic lines and still need to be addressed.

**What are some of your fondest memories working with Union Settlement?**

There are so many wonderful memories, from graduation ceremonies at the early childhood education centers to the college scholarship presentations and the recognition of staff. I also think of the wonderful authors who have come through our Adult Education Writing Program: Terry McMillan, Maryse Conde, and Esmeralda Santiago.

**What are some of your contributions you are most proud of at Union Settlement?**

I'm proud that I was part of the team that provided a rich benefits package for our staff. I also was part of the team that worked to renovate and upgrade our physical facilities. I helped to develop a staff recognition program and renovate part of our 104th Street garden area. I also took the Ethnic Festival from a department event to an agency-wide event.

**What are your plans for life after Union Settlement?**

I will start dog training and grooming classes at the end of February. I look forward to working with all kinds of dogs for years to come!

# 2019 SPRING BENEFIT CELEBRATING GENERATIONS

**Tuesday, April 16, 2019**  
at Guastavino's (409 East 59th Street)

6:30pm Cocktails & Silent Auction  
7:30pm Dinner & Program

## HONOREES

Ruth Pachman  
Angela and Seth Pinsky

## CORPORATE PARTNER AWARDEE

Neuberger Berman

## LAW FIRM PARTNER AWARDEE

Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP

## MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Deborah Roberts, *Award-Winning ABC News Correspondent*

Visit: [unionsettlement.org/gala](http://unionsettlement.org/gala) for more information.



# UNION SETTLEMENT

David Nocenti, Executive Director

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