



UNION
SETTLEMENT
CHRONICLE
SUMMER 2019



UNION SETTLEMENT CHRONICLE

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- BACK COVER** **Toasting Union Settlement, Thursday, October 24, 2019:** Join us for our annual fall reception, which kicks off our 125-year anniversary!

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

Summer programs
are crucial to
both children
and their families.



David Nocenti
Executive Director

 @davidnocenti

At summer camp, children make new friends in a different environment, which allows them to be seen in a new light, and build confidence that carries them forward to the next academic year.



Summer is here and our camp programs will be in full swing in July and August for **over 500 children from kindergarten through high school.**

In addition to allowing children to have fun, **there is ample evidence that well-designed summer programs, like those run by Union Settlement, promote a child's social, physical and cognitive skills.** Children in our summer programs participate in a wide range of educational activities that help them both develop new skills and utilize skills they learned during the school year, and thereby avoid the "summer slide" of lost academic abilities.

Summer camp is also important because it offers a structured opportunity for children to grow. **It allows kids to become independent and self-confident** while socializing, making new friends and enjoying new experiences.

For example, our middle school students can attend a five-week Summer STEM Academy, where they have the opportunity to build model robots and learn about science, technology, engineering and math.

Our elementary school children attend a seven-week summer program, which includes sports, arts and trips out of the city.

Our high school students can attend a summer writing program that helps them develop skills for college.

Students often attend school with the same peers year after year, which can lead to labeling, being "stuck" with a particular reputation, and too often being ostracized. Those children can become quiet or withdrawn, and reluctant to engage actively at school. **But at summer camp, children make new friends in a different environment, which allows them to be seen in a new light,** and build confidence that carries them forward to the next academic year.

Equally important, children in Union Settlement's summer programs get to know our amazing staff. Our employees lead, guide and mentor youth throughout the summer, and often become role models for them.

New friendships, confidence, independence, role models and a sense of belonging. **All of these things contribute to the development of children, and helps them transition into becoming strong, considerate and competent young adults.** Union Settlement offers all this and more to the youth of East Harlem.

Please reach out and set up a time to stop by and see our camp programs in action!

—David Nocenti

Your support helps get our seniors out in the summer sun. Here's how.



Maria Alejandro
Director of Senior Services

“The goal of our program is to improve the health of seniors,” says Maria Alejandro, Director of Union Settlement’s Senior Services. **“We want to keep seniors away from loneliness and depression, and get them out to enjoy the sunlight and the blessing of being alive!”**

Over 300 seniors participate in Union Settlement’s summer programs, and the range of activities grows each year. In addition to the usual activities at our four Senior Centers (daily group meals and a variety of exercise activities, nutrition classes, health and wellness programs, computer classes, games, arts and cultural activities), the summer provides even more enrichment.

For example, seniors can participate in a variety of trips out of East Harlem, which are extremely popular. There are trips to the Botanical Gardens, the Greenmarket on 14th Street, FDR State Park in Westchester County, boat rides and even trips to city beaches.

“You have no idea what it means for someone who is in a wheelchair to be taken to the beach and to feel the sand and water between her toes,” explains Maria. “For the trip to FDR State Park, we take about 200 seniors in three buses and we have a full day of activities.”

A new senior program that recently began is a photography class, sponsored by the Josephine Herrick Project, which takes seniors from Jefferson Senior Center on a walking tour around East Harlem. There are fourteen seniors enrolled in the class and each one is given his or her own camera to use. “They absolutely love it,” says Maria.

Twenty-five seniors are also able to attend a one-week camp in New Jersey. The camp, Star Lake Lodge, offers a wide range of activities, including boating, crafts, bocce ball, swimming, walking trails and much more.

Union Settlement also participates in a popular health fair each year, which is sponsored by Metropolitan Hospital, where over 800 people from all over the city get together and receive information and testing. **“It’s just another way we keep our seniors healthy,”** explains Maria.



(Top): Outdoor senior Zumba class at Union Settlement.
(Right): Our Senior Services participants enjoy a summer BBQ outing to FDR State Park in Westchester County.



SUMMER SPOTLIGHT

Summer can create obstacles for East Harlem families.

Union Settlement's summer programs help alleviate many hardships while providing a fun and educational place for the community's children and young people.



"There's a lot to celebrate every summer!"

Amanda Walker, Associate Director of Afterschool Programs

Union Settlement's summer programs provide East Harlem children with a fun and educational summer. Our elementary school summer camp programs run from July 1 through August 16, 8am to 6pm, Monday through Friday; middle school programs run through August 2nd, 8:30am to 3:30pm. These programs are geared toward fun and learning, however **they also ensure that working families do not bear the financial and logistical burden of keeping their children safe and active in the summer while they are at work.**

Amanda Walker, Associate Director of Afterschool Programs, is looking forward to this year's activities. **"The children will have an opportunity to dance, paint murals, build robots, explore different biomes and much, much more!"**

This year, we're especially excited to have the opportunity to partner for the first time with Volo City Kids Foundation, which is facilitating the physical fitness component of our summer camps. "Volo is creating a sports camp within our summer camp, providing whatever is needed for each sport—including the equipment, uniforms, activity training, instructors, and so forth," explains Amanda.

The goals each summer are both educational and social. "We want children to be able to develop different characteristics about themselves. We want them to learn different things

than they might while at school—especially about themselves," says Amanda. **"We've seen that some kids who struggle socially, after participating in our summer camps, go back to school in the fall and are able to participate in group activities with more confidence,** feeling like they are a part of their community—as opposed to remaining distant."

Our "themes" projects are always a highlight of our summer camp programs because they give children an opportunity to be extremely creative and implement their own imagination. For example, one summer our theme was "rainforests," so the children researched a specific rainforest, the animals that are in it and the different types of environments that are associated with an actual rainforest. They then created a specific project that came out of the overall theme. It all came together as a culminating performance, or showcase or display, and their peers, parents, and our colleagues were invited to see.

Academically, our summer camps offer a way to help children retain what they learned during the school year.

"Children in our summer programs have the opportunity to utilize the skills and concepts taught during the school year—usually in a really fun way! This enables them to retain a lot of that knowledge."

Working with local public schools, we are even able to customize an individual child's time in our summer camps by taking into account their academic interests or struggles. This could

mean, for example, if a student struggles in math, we will provide activities that bolster what they recently studied in math class.

Ultimately, our summer programs are about East Harlem's children achieving things that go beyond what they thought was even possible. "For me, the highlight is our end-of-summer celebrations," adds Amanda. "This is when you have an opportunity to see the culmination of the work that the children have done over the summer. They have been working so hard engaging in their workshops and creating, building, composing, or whatever they're doing in their particular activities. **I'm always blown away by how much they've learned and accomplished in such a short period of time. There's a lot to celebrate every summer!"**



MEET OUR Associate Board

This group of young professionals is lending their resources to help us empower East Harlem.

The Union Settlement Associate Board of Directors is a group of young professionals who share Union Settlement's commitment to equipping our East Harlem neighbors with the opportunities to better their lives and achieve their dreams.

Members connect both their professional and social circles to our organization through unique fundraising, networking and social events that the Associate Board and Union Settlement host each year.

Our Associate Board is currently composed of 19 members from a diverse set of professions including finance, technology, social services, journalism, legal, real estate, media and more.

Recently, the Associate Board volunteered with our Meals on Wheels program by preparing and delivering meals to homebound seniors in East Harlem. They also volunteered at our annual Spring Benefit and Fall Reception.

Fundraising efforts include the recent creation of the Associate Board Scholarship for graduates of Union Settlement's College Readiness Program. The original goal was to raise enough funds to award a single scholarship. However, enough money was raised by the Associate Board to award two scholarships!

Upcoming activities include another fundraiser in the fall, mentorships with Union Settlement youth participants and further volunteering efforts.



(Top): Associate Board members awarding the Associate Board Scholarships to two College Readiness graduates. (Middle): AB members preparing meals for Meals on Wheels. (Bottom): AB members and guests enjoying their spring fundraiser.

If you, or anyone you know, might be a good fit to join our Associate Board, please let us know!

Email jrost@unionsettlement.org
or visit
unionsettlement.org/associateboard

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STAFF INTERVIEW

AIM

(Advocacy, Intervention and Mentoring)



Steven Meyer
AIM, Program Director

US Tell us a little bit about the AIM program. What does it stand for and what does it entail?

STEVEN AIM is an acronym that stands for **Advocacy, Intervention and Mentoring**. The Department of Probation (DOP) designed it, and Union Settlement has been the contracted organization for the borough of Manhattan for nearly a decade.

We work alongside the DOP helping young people negotiate the conditions of their probation, and to hopefully help them change the trajectory that has brought them into the criminal justice world.

AIM is about creating a mentoring relationship. It is based upon the idea that participants on probation may buy into programs like this if they are developing a rapport with somebody who has walked in their shoes and has moved beyond the problems that they had when they were younger. We sometimes refer to this type of mentor as a “credible messenger.”

US How does AIM fall under the mission of Union Settlement? What is your role?

STEVEN Well, Union Settlement is about working with impoverished communities, and communities that don't have as many resources. We have long been defenders of social justice, and so I think Union Settlement recognizes the importance of providing support

to these young people who are entangled in the criminal justice system.

My role is to strengthen our partnership with the Department of Probation and to provide counseling and crisis intervention for participants and families when that's needed.

I will sit in on meetings that the participants will have with their probation officer, or at a school meeting. I may assist parents and help them find their voice to advocate for their child, or help the participants find their voice to be able to better advocate for themselves.

US Who is served by the program?

STEVEN We serve both high- and low-risk participants on probation between the ages of 13 to 18. **They come to our AIM program because the judge says: “I will try to provide these kids with one more opportunity to negotiate what's happening in their lives.”** Most of these kids have two strikes against them. We can never lose sight of the reality that the problems they're dealing with aren't pretty.

The judge will consider a participant's background, history, personal preferences, preferences that families might have, and more. It has to make sense that a mentorship-based program will suit a participant more so than, say, a job placement or mental health-based alternative program.

US Where has the model succeeded in your time with the AIM program? What are you most proud of?

STEVEN I'm most proud of the opportunities that mentors have had to truly be invited into the lives of our participants. As you can imagine, a lot of these participants have been struggling with problematic behavior for long periods of time. And that's created a lot of problems at home. Parents and caretakers don't know where to turn, and so a mentor can intervene and help a family feel supported. When those relationships between parents/caretakers and children are strengthened—that's a big moment I'm proud of.

US What upcoming initiatives are you excited about in the AIM program?

STEVEN Our contract with the Department of Probation was recently extended, so we will continue to serve as Manhattan's AIM provider for at least the next three years. The number of participants we can take on has also increased from 12 to 16.

I'm excited about collaborating with other Union Settlement youth programs to expand our offerings, especially in terms of a broader range of recreational activities.

And, on a broader level, I am excited to continue my commitment through this program to help figure out how to adequately address some of the real issues that these kids are dealing with. **We owe it to them and their families to ensure they have the opportunity and the voice to make the right choices that may ultimately define their life.**



Over two-thirds of youth participating in the Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM) program in New York City completed the program without being resentenced to a juvenile residential facility.

UNION SETTLEMENT

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Save the date for Toasting Union Settlement

Thursday, October 24

at Union Settlement
237 East 104th Street

