Adult Education

Giving adults the tools they need to lead a better life for themselves and their families.
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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www.unionsettlement.org
Celebrating local businesses during the holiday season.

This holiday season, we are thankful for many things, including having the privilege to serve and empower the thousands of East Harlem residents who participate in our programs.

In addition to providing vital services to individuals across their lifespan, Union Settlement also seeks to make East Harlem a better place to live for everyone, by boosting the local economy and helping small businesses thrive and grow.

The Buy Local East Harlem initiative – which we lead in conjunction with the New York Academy of Medicine and Metropolitan Hospital, and is supported by Citi Community Development and their NYC Department of Small Business Services – encourages local purchasing through a variety of innovative strategies, including:

- **“cash mobs,”** which involve groups of East Harlem residents visiting local businesses en masse to make purchases;
- **“meet and greets,”** where local businesses connect with and pitch their products and services to major anchor institutions like hospitals, museums and large social service providers;
- **monthly merchant meetings,** where local business owners can exchange information and strategies; and
- **events like Taste of East Harlem,** which attracts more than a dozen local restaurants and food businesses to share their fare with over 250 visitors and residents.

Last month, we were proud to issue a new report (available on our website) showing that the Buy Local East Harlem initiative has generated over $500,000 in additional sales for participating small businesses over the past two years!

One of the businesses we have helped is Think Big Data, which received a new contract to help Metropolitan Hospital develop a portion of its website that promotes new services the hospital is rolling out in the community.

“Without Buy Local East Harlem, I would have never gotten to meet the right people at Metropolitan and benefit from their commitment to neighborhood businesses as an anchor institution,” says founder Rodney Mendez, who grew up just blocks from the hospital. “It gave us the foot in the door we needed.”

We are inspired by the hard work, determination and ingenuity of our local business owners here in East Harlem, and are proud to showcase and promote the diversity and quality of goods and services they offer.

Wishing everyone a happy, safe and joyful holiday season.

—David Nocenti

David Nocenti
Executive Director

We are inspired by the hard work, determination and ingenuity of our local business owners here in East Harlem.

Small Business Saturday
We gave a tour of East Harlem merchants and provided a free trolley between stops.
Your support helps new immigrants learn English. Here’s how.

Azza Zaki
Adult Education Teacher

“I know what it’s like not to be able to communicate with anyone,” says Azza Zaki, one of Union Settlement’s ESL teachers, “I’m an immigrant, just like my students.”

Azza moved to the United States from Egypt and became an ESL teacher because she knows firsthand the struggle of navigating a new country and learning a new language.

In East Harlem, 23% of residents do not speak English “very well.” Prospective ESL students come to Union Settlement for an assessment of their level of proficiency, ranging from beginner to high intermediate.

Azza teaches our beginner classes, and with her students knowing little to no English and coming from a variety of different countries, she has to get creative when it comes to her approach. The key is to make the classes engaging and fun. Azza pursued a TESLA (Teaching English as a Second Language to Adults) certification which taught her how using games and flashcards can reinforce vocabulary and language usage. Students in our ESL courses are also encouraged to watch 30 minutes of the news in English each day to build up proper language structure.

It’s also important to teach vocabulary that is relevant to the real life scenarios our students may face. Having been through this journey herself, Azza understands exactly what these situations might entail. “All of my students need to find a job. They need to help their children, but how can they even speak at a parent-teacher conference? How can they ask a question at the supermarket? How can they get a doctor’s appointment? These are the things my students need to be able to do.” Azza is incredibly proud of her students when they come back and tell her they were able to communicate in any of these situations.

“All of my students need to find a job. They need to help their children, but how can they even speak at a parent-teacher conference? How can they ask a question at the supermarket? How can they get a doctor’s appointment?”

“I love my students very much and try to create a classroom that is a safe and comfortable environment for them.” Azza’s students love her, too. She has excellent student retention rates and her students are often sad to leave her class when it’s time for them to move up to the next level.
Hilda Cortés, Director of Adult Education, certainly has a lot on her plate. She manages ten teachers who educate approximately 350 students each year in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and Adult Basic Education and High School Equivalency (ABE/HSE) classes. She manages everything from recruiting prospective students to class scheduling and, most importantly, making sure the students are happy and have all the tools they need to succeed.

In East Harlem, 29% of adults have less than a high school education and only 28% have a four-year college degree. Some residents are illiterate, including immigrants who lack literacy in their native language. We strive to close the education-unemployment gap by giving individuals the opportunity to improve their English language skills, earn their high school diploma and prepare for the workforce.

Approximately 70% of our students are Latino, representing more than a dozen Latin American countries of origin. About 10% self-identify as Black or African American, many coming from West Africa and Haiti. Another large group comes from the Middle East, primarily Yemen.

Many immigrants and refugees arrive in the United States having earned their high school diploma in their home country, but are lacking formal documentation of their credentials. For non-native English speakers, language creates an extra layer of difficulty in earning their high school diploma in the United States. Union Settlement alleviates some of this difficulty for native Spanish speakers by offering high school equivalency (HSE) preparation courses in Spanish. “We are the only provider of HSE courses in Spanish in Manhattan and only one of two providers in all of New York City,” say Ms. Cortés. Spanish-language academic instruction enables these individuals to significantly reduce the amount of time it will take them to earn high school diplomas, particularly since the TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) exam can be taken in Spanish.

“Students come to me and tell me, ‘I want to be able to help my children with their homework’ or ‘I want to get a better job,’” says Ms. Cortés. Union Settlement’s Adult Education courses allow them to do just that. For example, former Union Settlement student Jazmine Robles dropped out of high school in 2000, started GED classes elsewhere in 2003 and dropped out of that program after 3 months. In 2015, she came to Union Settlement and initially wanted to drop out again, but with the support of our staff, she stuck with it and earned her equivalency diploma in 2017. She went on to become a Medical Assistant and now wants to go back to school to become a Registered Nurse.

Ms. Cortés says, “I am always looking for new ways to further expand learning in our classrooms.” She has been working to acquire more technology, such as laptops, smart boards, and projectors that can be incorporated into the classroom. She is also hoping to begin offering job readiness courses tailored to immigrants. These courses would teach skills such as basic computer programming and how to prepare résumés for the American workforce. Many of our students are also interested in citizenship courses, which she hopes to launch next year.
The Joseph H. Flom Foundation was established in 1988 by its namesake, who was a partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom. The Foundation and its founder, Mr. Flom, played key roles in the establishment of the Skadden Fellows Program and supported initiatives for judicial reform, such as the Innocence Project.

In recent years, it has taken a keen interest in programs that improve educational outcomes for underserved children in New York up to age 8. The Foundation funds in-school and out-of-school programs, both during the school year and summer, for typical and atypical learners, as well as parenting programs for the parents and guardians of the youngest New Yorkers.

The Joseph H. Flom Foundation has supported Union Settlement’s Intergenerational Tutoring Program (ITP) since 2017. The program recruits and trains older adults to be Reading Mentors for children in kindergarten through third grade in East Harlem elementary schools. Thanks to the Foundation’s generous support, we were able to hire a full-time Program Coordinator, Kyra Giles, who has increased the number of schools, children and volunteers served by the program.

Currently, 45 Reading Mentors are working with 95 children who attend PS 96, PS 146, PS 964, PS 112 and Amber Charter School. Volunteers receive a high level of support, including 12 hours of initial training, on-site coaching, and monthly workshops led by a literacy specialist.

“`We are not only grateful to the Joseph H. Flom Foundation for its support, but are also proud to be among its grantees,” says David Nocenti. “We love being able to help children develop mastery and become proficient readers and writers.” We are fortunate to have earned the interest and support of the Foundation’s staff and trustees.

Susan Baer, the Foundation’s Executive Director, indicates that they are particularly pleased to support our efforts to bring ITP to more schools during the academic year, as well as to summer sites to combat summer learning loss. She says, “We are proud to be a small part of the Union Settlement family and their effort to help get all children reading at grade level by the end of third grade.”

Union Settlement’s Intergenerational Tutoring Program will persevere in its pursuit of this goal with the support of generous donors, such as the Joseph H. Flom Foundation.

If you, or anyone you know, might be interested in becoming a tutor, please let us know!

Email kgiles@unionsettlement.org or call 212-828-6114.
PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW

Baking up an East Harlem Business

Tabatha Lozano
Owner, Sprinkle Splash Sweet Shoppe

UNION SETTLEMENT What has your involvement been with Union Settlement and our Business Development Center?

TABATHA Sprinkle Splash has been involved with Union Settlement in a variety of ways. We have actively participated in many of the grassroots marketing opportunities, such as a Mount Sinai tasting event, the Metropolitan Hospital Holiday Bazaar, the Taste of East Harlem, “Cash Mobs” and more! Additionally, we have taken advantage of many small business courses, such as a Business Branding two-day class, a Customer Service/Restaurant Etiquette Class, and the Health Handlers Certification course.

US How has your involvement with Union Settlement impacted your business?

TABATHA Union Settlement has positively impacted my business in many ways. For one, it created the East Harlem Community Alliance, a community network of local businesses. They do all of the legwork of connecting dozens of businesses together.

For a “solopreneur” like myself, this network has allowed me to foster relationships with other like-minded local business owners to share ideas and, in some cases, partnerships. We currently feature a jalapeño tequila cupcake in which we feature YaVe Tequila, an East Harlem-born company.

These partnerships lead to multiple opportunities for generating additional revenue streams. Had it not been for Union Settlement, I would have never known of YaVe.

I have been to many Small Business Services centers and Union Settlement’s is by far the most knowledgeable and compassionate resource center I’ve visited. Every visit leaves me feeling empowered and confident about the future of Sprinkle Splash Sweet Shoppe.

US In what ways have you seen Union Settlement impact other East Harlem small businesses?

TABATHA There are too many to list, but some major examples include a huge contract for a local web developer, increases in sales for ALL businesses within the Alliance, and the Cash Mobs have had a great impact, especially during slower months.

Creating a sense of community gives owners a desire to support and patronize local businesses for daily meals, events, catering, transportation, printing, cakes, spa services, web design/IT support, and more.

Union Settlement has encouraged this business community to recycle our hard-earned dollars amongst each other before spending outside of our neighborhood.

US Have you learned anything from Union Settlement’s small business offerings that has helped you personally better manage a business?

TABATHA Absolutely! I’ve learned to think more creatively about marketing my business, how to handle conflicts with clients and or staff, how to earn different certifications, how to create an elevator pitch, and the importance of branding (and how to do it well, without causing brand confusion).

Thanks to Union Settlement’s assistance and guidance, I have avoided many first-time business owner mistakes.

US Why do you think it’s important for Union Settlement to have a presence in the East Harlem small business community?

TABATHA Losing Union Settlement’s presence in the community would be like losing a family member. They are a pivotal part of our community — the glue that keeps us all connected, and I am grateful to the entire team.

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