



United **Neighborhood** Houses

70 West 36th Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10018
212-967-0322 • www.unhny.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
Nancy Wackstein



@UNHNY



UNH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers

Sidney Lapidus
Honorary Chair
M. Bryna Sanger, Ph.D.
President
Patricia M. Carey, Ph.D.
Vice President
Roger Juan Maldonado, Esq.
Vice President
Marc S. Dieli
Treasurer
Thomas M. Cerabino, Esq.
Secretary & Counsel
Lewis Kramer
Immediate Past President

Directors

Eric C. Andrus
Rahul Baig
Paul F. Balsler
Darel M. Benaim, Ph.D.
Michael N. Berkowitz
Joyce Bove
Arthur Byrd
Matthew Chun
Daniel Eudene
David Garza
Nelson Hioe
Alain Kodsi
Jack Krauskopf
David Kubie
Ken Jockers
Norman Levy

Nandika Madgavkar
Ann L. Marcus
Ilene Margolin
Michelle Neugebauer
Gary Pagano
Stephan Russo
Warren Scharf
Tom Skrobe
Arthur J. Stainman
Mary Elizabeth Taylor
Patrick Vatel

Emeriti

Anthony D. Knerr, *President*
Richard Abrons, *Director*
Emily Menlo Marks,
Executive Director

OVERCOMING THE ODDS:

The Settlement House
Advantage

reciprocity

MULTIPLE POINTS OF ENTRY

EMBEDDEDNESS

community building

SENSE OF EFFICACY

SENSE OF BELONGING

sense of possibility

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY 2015


United
Neighborhood
Houses

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I must say that if we didn’t have this place we would be lost. This is like a second home for the people to come to.”

Two thirds of the nearly 3,000 respondents **live in the neighborhood** where the settlement house is located. Almost **19% worked in the neighborhood** and **25% attended a local school**.

“I feel at home here and still visit regularly. I still refer friends to the program. Love it.”

Participants said they felt at home at their settlement house and that they referred friends to it; **62% reported that friends already attended** settlement house programs.

“This organization is an integral part of the community.”

As would be expected for the settlement house model, nearly **60% of respondents had heard about the organization** and/or its programs **by word of mouth**—from friends, family members, or other local sources.

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, settlement houses have worked to strengthen individuals and families and to build communities by addressing individual and social problems and enriching the quality of life. This report tells the story of the 38 settlement houses that are members of United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH), serving over half a million New Yorkers each year at more than 500 sites. It is clear that these 21st century settlements and their program participants are pressed every day to “do more with less.” Yet both individuals and agencies are “overcoming the odds.” The sense of belonging, efficacy, and possibility gained by program participants energizes personal growth, neighborhood life, civic participation, and New York City itself. The settlement houses move forward by holding onto their historic mission while reinterpreting it to address contemporary issues.

Located in crowded, largely immigrant neighborhoods, the original settlements worked to improve local standards of living in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They offered a broad array of comprehensive services, including day nurseries, recreation, lending libraries, and cultural activities, as well as initiatives to improve housing, education, and jobs. Based on lessons learned from their work, some settlement house leaders moved beyond providing services to building community and pursuing legislative reform at the city, state, and even federal levels.

The original settlements thrived in these early days, and again briefly in the 1960s. In contrast, as the mid-1970s ushered in a new period of austerity, public policies yielded reduced government and private funding, program cutbacks, and problematic grant and contract payment methods. These and other changes required the settlements to compete more actively for both dollars and “market share” with other non-profit and for-profit service organizations. While resources dwindled, higher poverty rates, growing unemployment, immigration, gentrification, and demographic shifts increased the needs of local residents. In the context of doing “more with less,” the resulting demand for their services had the potential to challenge the foundation of the settlement house mission. However, in *Overcoming the Odds*, settlement house program participants report that the “Settlement House Advantage” is alive and well—and more relevant than ever.

The Settlement House Model

UNH settlement houses are guided by a distinctive model of neighborhood-based work that provides essential social services while recognizing the value of building communities and promoting social justice. The settlement house model encompasses four basic service principles that are described in separate sections below: Embeddedness, multiple points of entry, reciprocity, and community building. Guided by these principles, the work of the settlement houses generates three definable outcomes for participants: A sense of belonging, a sense of efficacy, and a sense of possibility, known here as the Settlement House Advantage. This report documents the cumulative impact of the settlement model, in ways that benefit individuals and local communities while rippling through New York City as a whole.

THE STUDY

To assess the ongoing impact of the model, UNH and its member organizations decided to explore if and how program participants experienced the four principles and whether the settlement house programs produced the three expected outcomes. A committee of senior settlement house and UNH staff embarked on a research project in collaboration with Mimi Abramovitz, DSW, the Bertha Capen Reynolds Professor of Social Policy at Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, City University of New York. Using a participatory action research model, the research team laid out working definitions for the four principles and three outcomes, developed a 188-question survey, trained program staff to administer it, analyzed the data, and interpreted the findings. The survey, approved by the Hunter College/CUNY Institutional Review Board, also was reviewed by a literacy specialist to ensure that the questions could be understood by persons with a fourth-grade education. It was translated into Spanish and Mandarin. Nearly 3,000 program participants from 25 settlements completed surveys. Many also wrote notes and comments in the space provided.

“I am very pleased with this organization as I had to go downtown before for the help that I am getting now.”

More than **85% of respondents said the programs helped them to meet their needs** as they saw them. 70% said they get information about [other] agencies and programs in the community.

“This organization plays a vital role in this community. Its programs and services are something that community members would not have access to otherwise.”

Participants' reasons for coming to the settlement house varied widely: **30% came to enroll their children** in a program; 18% came to address a personal problem for themselves or their children. Other reasons included gaining skills, help with housing or homelessness prevention, immigration issues, food, employment, adult education, social activities, recreation, and companionship.

“This organization has a social worker on hand when I need to talk or get something done. I was helped with housing when I needed it. There are also many other programs that I use such as GED and more.”

About **38% attended two or more programs**. Three quarters said they had become active in programs other than the ones they initially attended.

“I love the program, how much they do and how much care for my kids and my community.”

On a scale from one to 10, nearly **80% of the survey participants rated the programs eight or higher** for both caring about members and doing a good job for them.

“This building, its staff and members are a lighthouse in this community for people of varying ages, religions, and ethnicities to get together for companionship, activities, learning, etc.”

82% said staff encouraged them to **“treat people who are different from me with dignity and respect”**; **75%** gave staff high marks for how staff handled demographic differences among participants.

“The staff are very respectful to everyone.”

75% of the respondents said that the staff and participants **share the same values** and **85%** reported that the staff **“respects our beliefs and the ways we do things at home and in the community.”**

“I am an active 81-year-old. Being connected with the community has made me more self confident.”

The goal of **increasing their own self-confidence** was the second most frequently mentioned (by 65%) and the second most frequently achieved (65%).

THE FINDINGS

Summary

This study clearly documented the Settlement House Advantage. Results showed that settlement house participants recognize and value the four basic principles that guide the work of the settlement houses and benefit from them. They see the settlement as a community hub, embedded in the neighborhood, which acts as a gateway to multiple services, addresses basic needs, brings local residents together around mutual concerns, builds solid relationships, and empowers residents. Respondents credit the staff for valuing their contributions, possessing the knowledge and skills needed to address their daily life challenges, nurturing community leaders, and mobilizing resources for social change. Positive outcomes increased with the length of time participants had been with the settlement and with the amount of time they spent in programs there. The findings confirm the value of settlement house programs to individuals, families, and neighborhoods and reveal an important multiplier effect: The outcomes of settlement house programs also contribute to the well-being of New York City as a whole.

Principles

EMBEDDEDNESS

As place-based organizations, being part of the geographical area they serve is at the heart of settlement house work. When a community-based organization is truly part of its community, it has the trust and respect of its neighbors and is uniquely positioned to bring residents from different backgrounds together in programs designed to address their needs, find common ground, and advocate for crucial community resources. The findings clearly demonstrate that the participants see the settlements as deeply embedded in the community.

MULTIPLE POINTS OF ENTRY

Settlement houses offer many activities, programs, and services, with some operating as a gateway to others. When an organization offers multiple programs to address diverse needs and encourages participation in everything the agency offers, it embodies a comprehensive, holistic approach to service provision.

Participants and members of their families may pursue solutions for one or more basic needs across their life span and move on to explore other personal and community interests. In doing so, they develop relationships across programs with individuals of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and incomes. Survey participants

reported that they and the people they live with took advantage of these multiple points of entry, often participating in more than one program. They benefitted from access to programs that addressed a wide range of their own needs and interests and those of family members across generations.

RECIPROCITY

The settlement house principle of reciprocity assumes that all participants have strengths and abilities to build on to benefit the programs, the organization, and the community. All participants are encouraged to contribute and to respect and support one another. Survey respondents indicated that staff respected them, recognized their strengths, and encouraged them to express their needs, collaborate with other participants, and contribute to the organization and the community.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Settlement house programs build bonds, create networks, promote advocacy, and develop connections across generational, cultural, and racial divides. The resulting collaborations nourish the spirit, honor diversity, foster civic engagement, and promote social justice. In operation, the principle helps amplify local voices and maximizes civic engagement. The survey showed that the settlement houses built a sense of community first by helping participants meet their basic needs and then encouraging them to help others in their programs. The settlements bring participants together to address issues across barriers of age, race, ethnicity, and income by helping each other and other community residents mobilize to obtain resources and by encouraging and supporting various levels of civic participation.

Outcomes

SENSE OF BELONGING

The sense of belonging is one of the most basic of human needs, affecting overall mental health, self-efficacy, self-esteem, reduced stress, and better coping abilities. In recent decades, increased mobility, immigration, changing neighborhood demographics, and economic stresses, combined with the decreasing impact of “mediating” entities like neighborhood schools and religious institutions, have increased the number of people feeling alone or isolated. Many residents in settlement house neighborhoods, especially those of lower income, are among the most vulnerable to such feelings. But the survey demonstrated that participation with a settlement house does indeed promote a sense of belonging such that participants feel that they fit into and add value to the settlement house and to the neighborhoods where they live, work, or go to school.

“I am very happy to be a member because I have learned many different ways to be active, social, and helpful to other members.”

Although only 7% actually described themselves as activists, **52%** reported that they **became more active in their community** as a result of participation in the settlement.

“The law project ...let me know that it's ok to question [and] to fight for justice and social change.”

Respondents expressed **a desire to be active in the community** (63.0%), to volunteer (58%), to work for social change (54%), and to become a community advocate (50%).

“As I said, I wanted to make a difference.”

Participants reported that since their settlement house involvement they **paid more attention to the news** (79.8%); **voted in an election** (50.5%); became active in their community (51.6%); joined a community organization (39%); attended a legislative meeting or public hearing (38.4%); contacted an elected official (36.6%); or wrote a letter to the editor (24.1%).

“It’s in my will, to give money to Meals on Wheels. Continue what you do!”

73% of respondents said the settlement house definitely would be missed if it closed, and 51% said it was very likely that they would give money to the organization if they won the lottery.

“This organization cares about the community, thus the community cares about the organization.”

More than **86% of the respondents reported that their settlement house programs improved the community and the neighborhood**. A majority said the programs bring useful activities and services into the community.

“I think that if places like this existed in more communities our society would be way better.”

More than **75%** said that the programs **support social and economic justice**.

SENSE OF EFFICACY

The concept of efficacy refers to individuals’ perception of their own ability to complete a task or belief in their ability to reach a specific goal. A strong sense of efficacy enables individuals to develop a deeper interest in activities, to view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered, and to recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments. The survey demonstrated that participation in settlement house activities was associated with a strong sense of efficacy, which grew over the time that individuals participated and with the frequency of their participation.

SENSE OF POSSIBILITY

The settlement house principles are rooted in the Progressive Era tradition of optimism and belief in the possibility of and hope for change among individuals and communities. People with this life orientation tend to adapt better to adverse events, learn from negative situations, focus on problem solving, and assume that the situation, however adverse, can be handled successfully in one way or another. Hope and the sense of possibility can be learned, and this study indicates that settlement house participants demonstrated optimism and a sense of possibility for the future.

Conclusion

In brief, both the settlement houses and their program participants are overcoming the odds. Despite the sagging economy and shrinking resources, the settlement houses have overcome the odds by keeping up with the changing times while advancing their historic strength-based, community-based, civic-engagement mission. Faced with family responsibilities, language barriers, and economic hardship, program participants, through their settlement house affiliations, also overcome the odds and develop a greater sense of belonging, efficacy, and possibility. This is, indeed, the Settlement House Advantage.



MEMBER AGENCIES

1. Arab-American Family Support Ctr.
2. Broadway Housing Communities
3. BronxWorks
4. CAMBA
5. Center for Family Life in Sunset Park
6. Chinese-American Planning Council
7. Claremont Neighborhood Centers
8. Cypress Hills Local Development Corp.
9. East Side House Settlement, Inc.
10. Educational Alliance
11. Goddard Riverside Community Ctr.
12. Grand Street Settlement
13. Greenwich House, Inc.
14. Hamilton-Madison House
15. Hartley House
16. Henry Street Settlement
17. Hudson Guild
18. Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Ctr., Inc.
19. Kingsbridge Heights Community Ctr.
20. Lenox Hill Neighborhood House
21. Lincoln Square Neighborhood Ctr., Inc.
22. Mosholu Montefiore Community Ctr.
23. New Settlement Apts.
24. Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp.
25. Project Hospitality
26. Queens Community House
27. Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Inc.
28. Riverdale Neighborhood House, Inc.
29. St. Nicks Alliance
30. School Settlement Association, Inc.
31. Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc.
32. Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Ctrs.
33. Sunnyside Community Services
34. SCAN New York
35. Union Settlement Association
36. United Community Centers, Inc.
37. University Settlement Society
38. Women's Housing & Economic Development Corp. (WHEDco)

