



Photo courtesy of Lenox Hill Neighborhood House



UNITED
NEIGHBORHOOD
HOUSES

Rebuilding and Resilience:

A 2021 Policy Platform for New York City
by United Neighborhood Houses

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United Neighborhood Houses believes a thriving city is one in which people, their communities, and their government work together to eliminate inequity and racial injustice and promote connections that build stronger neighborhoods for all.

A History of Leading Resiliency & Recovery

For over 130 years, New York settlement houses have been stabilizing forces in their neighborhoods, leading critical recovery efforts during public health, economic, and natural disasters.

In 1886, the first settlement house in the United States, University Settlement, addressed the issues facing immigrants living in poverty on the Lower East Side. In 1918, Henry Street Settlement's Visiting Nurse Service was on the front lines responding to the flu pandemic—losing 25% of its nursing staff in the process. During World War II, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House provided an all-day childcare program to care for children whose fathers were at war and mothers were at work.

Throughout the 1970s, when the city saw divestment, BronxWorks (then Citizen's Advice Bureau), was founded to provide housing assistance, tenant advocacy, and nutritional supports for its neighbors. Immediately following the September 11 terrorist attacks, Educational Alliance was the only childcare

center to remain open on the Lower East Side. And during Hurricane Sandy, Red Hook Initiative and Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation were lifelines for public housing residents.

Rebuilding a Stronger and More Equitable City

The settlement house approach is embedded in the neighborhood, has multiple points of entry, serves all age groups, and is focused on community building and reciprocity. Today, as our city battles the COVID-19 pandemic, strives for racial equity, and works to rebuild our local economy, settlement houses are on the frontlines of their communities, supporting food pantries and meal delivery programs, caring for older homebound adults, and providing continuous programs to support children and families. They are centers of community renewal offering early childhood education, mental health support, adult education, housing assistance, job training, and more. COVID-19 has shined a spotlight on the many inequalities that communities served by settlement houses have faced, and in many cases has exacerbated them. Despite this and the invaluable role settlement houses play in our city's response and recovery, they have not seen adequate government support or investment and have had to exhaust their resources to accomplish this work.

Settlement houses are filling in the gaps where government action has fallen short, and they cannot continue to do so alone. Their ability to continue successfully responding to this crisis is directly tied to the support, engagement, and flexibility of our government partners. As we move forward, our city's leaders must take into account the proven impact of settlement houses over time while simultaneously envisioning the even greater impact settlement houses could have if adequately funded.

UNH proposes the following policy and funding recommendations to support and protect our neighbors, build strong communities, and stabilize community infrastructure. **Together, these recommendations chart a course toward making New York neighborhoods the resilient, thriving centers of community life they can and should be.**



Supporting Our Neighbors

All New Yorkers deserve to live safely and affordably in their neighborhoods with easy access to services that keep them learning, working, healthy, connected, and supported.

Early Childhood Care and Education

Every child in New York deserves access to safe, high-quality, and affordable early childhood care and education. Early childhood programs improve school readiness, narrow the achievement gap, boost high school completion, and increase job earnings in adulthood. They also benefit parents, as working families need full-day childcare for infants, toddlers, and pre-school aged children. In New York City, settlement houses and community-based organizations (CBOs) have traditionally provided the only affordable childcare options in family settings and center-based programs.



While New York City has made significant strides in recent years to achieve universal access to Pre-K for 4 year-olds and increase the number of programs serving 3 year-old children, these are still partial day, partial year programs. They do not provide full-time, year round childcare that many working families need and are not always a sustainable solution for families. Additionally, there still is not nearly enough subsidized child care for infants and toddlers; in the most recent contract awards under the new Birth to Five system, the Department of Education only awarded 2,300

center-based infant and toddler slots, nowhere near the need. According to the Citizens Committee for Children, an estimated 93% of families with young children cannot afford center-based care for their infants and toddlers, and 80% cannot afford somewhat less expensive home-based care. Without subsidized child care, parents cannot maintain stable employment.

Recommendation: City leaders must drastically expand subsidized infant and toddler care, increase access to extended-day and year-round programs, reduce enrollment barriers for families, and fairly compensate this workforce.

Afterschool & Summer

Afterschool and summer programs offer school-aged children opportunities for further education, socialization, and recreation outside of the traditional school setting. They are also a core support for working parents and caregivers who need a safe, positive, and educational environment for their children beyond the typical school day and year. New York City's COMPASS, SONYC, Beacon, and Cornerstone contracts support afterschool and summer programs located in schools, community centers, and NYCHA developments and serve approximately 235,000 youth annually. Yet, with 1.1 million children in the public school system, these programs reach only a fraction of the students and families who need these supports. Elementary afterschool programs serve only an estimated 51,000 students, and middle school summer programs—which face the budget chopping block every year—serve only an estimated 34,000 students. As providers continue addressing the increased social-emotional needs, learning loss, and trauma facing NYC children, they will need expanded capacity, better tools, more accurate information, and more timely communication from the City.

Recommendation: As afterschool and summer program providers continue addressing the detrimental and cumulative learning loss and trauma experienced by NYC children, the City must ensure universal access for *all* families who need the services, better academic and social-emotional support tools, more accurate information delivered in a timely fashion, and a steady, stable funding stream.



Summer Jobs/Youth Employment

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) offers employment opportunities and career experiences to young people ages 14 to 24. SYEP acts as an economic stimulus for low-income families and their communities, and has proven educational benefits, such as higher GPAs and school retention for participants in the semesters following their participation. In recent years, New York City has greatly expanded SYEP, reaching nearly 75,000 jobs in Summer 2019. In Summer 2020, the City's budget crisis, caused by COVID-19, greatly diminished the program's capacity, leaving only 35,000 slots available to

young people. Moving forward, SYEP will be a lifeline for young people and their families. In addition to gaining skills, work experience, and new connections, SYEP participants are able to earn an income and contribute to their family's economic stability. This will be especially important for families who have experienced job-loss and greater levels of disconnection due to COVID-19.

Recommendation: City leaders must, once again, ensure 75,000 youth have access to SYEP in 2021, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a universal program to serve the 150,000+ youth who apply for the program each year.

Out-of-School, Out-of-Work Youth

During the 2008 recession, the number of 16- to 24-year-olds in New York City who were out-of-school and out-of-work exploded, leaving nearly 240,000 young people to miss out on formative career-building experiences. In response, settlement houses worked to ramp up their work with this population, investing deeper in programs that connect young people to job opportunities, provide educational and emotional supports, offer financial aid resources, and support their enrollment in skill-based training programs. The settlement house approach took into consideration that—beyond economic turbulence—other factors also play a significant role in young people's ability to connect with educational and economic systems, including challenges in K-12 schooling, struggles with college completion and job retention, absence of strong networks and/or support systems, and institutional racism, which leads to disproportionate representation of Black and Latinx youth in this population. As a result of the settlement houses work and other interventions at the City and State level, the number of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults decreased substantially, hitting a low of approximately 130,000 in 2018, according to research by JobsFirstNYC.

Today, with the economy in crisis, once again, New York City must prioritize programs and services that reconnect young New Yorkers to education, employment and training as part of the City's COVID-19 response. As a member of the City's Disconnected Youth Task Force, United Neighborhoods Houses contributed to **Connecting our Future**, a 2020 report which focuses attention on out-of-school, out-of-work youth and includes a set of recommendations to deliver immediate help for those at risk of disconnecting from school and work. Many of the recommendations included in the report are informed by the settlement house model. Additionally, the latest Request for Proposals (RFP) from the Department for Youth and Community Development for the Neighborhood Development Areas (NDAs) phases out the Opportunity Youth option, just at a moment when it is needed most.

Recommendation: City leaders must implement the **recommendations** of the Disconnected Youth Task Force and fund social service programs where staff have direct access to young people and use proven strategies to prevent youth disconnection and to re-engage those already out-of-school, out-of-work.

Adult Literacy

There are more than 2.2 million 18- to 64-year-olds in New York City who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, English language proficiency, and/or a high school diploma. Over the years, settlement houses have expanded their adult literacy programs, like English as a Second Language (ESOL), to reach more parents, employees, job seekers, and voters seeking to improve their skills. In these programs, students make friends and important connections in their neighborhoods, experience the benefits of cultural diversity, and become vital contributors to their communities. They also gain access to a wide variety of services beyond adult literacy, like food pantries, senior centers, and youth programs for their children. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, adult literacy programs are helping stabilize the lives of many essential workers who went to great lengths to support their neighbors and sustain our communities. Unfortunately, demand consistently exceeds supply, leaving adults who wish to improve their lives through literacy and community engagement out of luck.



Recommendation: City leaders must expand and fully fund adult literacy programs, and ensure providers have the resources needed to offer quality and comprehensive educational services to the over 2.2 million New Yorkers who need them.

Older Adult Services

New York's older adult population is the fastest growing demographic in New York City. Between 2010 and 2040, the City's 65+ will increase by 40.7 percent, from 1,002,000 in 2010 to 1,410,000 in 2040. Projections show that by 2040, there will be more people age 65+ than there are school-aged children in New York City. Settlement houses are meeting the growing needs of this population through collaborative networks of senior centers, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), case management and caregiver services, SNAP assistance, and home delivered meal programs. With one in five older adults (220,000 people age 65+) living below the federal poverty level—double the national average—greater investment in settlement houses and CBOs working with this population is direly needed.

When COVID-19 spread through New York City, older adults disproportionately suffered, experiencing heightened levels of loneliness, food insecurity, infection rates, and death. Settlement houses immediately responded, ensuring their neighbors had access to coordinated daily meals, technology and devices needed to stay connected, wellness checks to address isolation, and emotional support to help them cope with losing neighbors, friends, and loved ones. They completely rearranged their centers to serve as food pantries, COVID testing sites, and vaccination hubs. Unfortunately, only 152,000 older adults are currently able to participate in these vital programs (note: DFTA programs serve

individuals aged 60+, as well as their caregivers). Investment is needed to expand the reach of this network and reduce waiting lists.

Recommendation: As NYC’s older adults increasingly rely on settlement houses and other community-based organizations to meet their basic needs, the City must expand and support its network of its older adult programs and services. These services are crucial supports for the many older adults living in poverty, as well as those who fall just above the federal poverty level but also struggle financially. Additionally, these programs are important not only for providing supportive services but also for serving as places of meaningful connection where older adults can get involved in their broader community.



Community Mental Health

Settlement houses are long-standing providers of community-based mental health services. By using a neighborhood-based, holistic approach, they are able to meet their neighbors where they are at, help them get started on their mental health journey, connect them with outside resources, and host group discussions that aim to de-stigmatize mental health within communities. During COVID-19, settlement houses quickly pivoted their mental health services, offering remote support to people throughout their various programs. The emotional aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis will likely be felt by community members of all ages for years to come, so it will be crucial that skilled settlement house staff have the resources they need to continue developing mental health initiatives throughout their communities.

Recommendation: City leaders must embed mental health services in more community-based settings to ensure staff have the tools and supports to address emerging mental health challenges, with an emphasis on COVID-19 related trauma. Additionally, the City must provide assistance to community-based organizations to obtain the licensure, expertise, capacity, and space, to fulfill this role, as many wish to do so but the start-up work is a significant barrier.



Building Strong Communities

Community centers are the backbone of our neighborhoods. Ensuring people feel valued, engaged, and represented on their blocks lays the foundation for strong communities.

Food Insecurity

Even before COVID-19, New York City was facing a profound hunger crisis—particularly in the communities that settlement houses have long served. The pandemic, and the economic crash that followed, has significantly worsened this problem. To meet their neighbor's nutritional needs, settlement houses are working around the clock to expand their food pantries, coordinate home delivered meals, and assist families with SNAP enrollment. Yet, hunger continues to spread, unequally, across the city, impacting communities of color that have been disproportionately harmed by decades of inequities and systemic failures. The City must promote stronger community infrastructures by investing more resources in settlement houses and CBOs. Every day, they are developing new initiatives and systems to provide food to their neighbors in need.



Recommendation: City leaders must increase access to SNAP and partner with community-based organizations to provide greater emergency food assistance.

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

As longtime advocates for public houses, settlement houses recognize that all New Yorkers deserve dignified, affordable housing. NYCHA provides housing for more than 400,000 New Yorkers, and manages community space for more than 250 community centers, childcare centers, and senior centers. Settlement houses have a major presence in NYCHA developments, with 24 UNH members operating programs out of 125 NYCHA-based sites. They provide on-site social services including early childhood education, senior centers, workforce development activities, and more. Unfortunately, after years of government divestment, NYCHA has an immense capital improvement backlog. In recent years, complaints about vermin, broken elevators, contaminated water, lead paint, heating issues, and other unsafe living conditions have mired the facilities' reputation, leaving residents feeling undervalued and under represented. Essential community programs such as Cornerstones, senior centers, early childhood education classrooms, and job training programs deserve clean and safe community space.

Recommendation: City leaders must significantly invest in NYCHA developments to ensure safe and healthy living conditions for residents and prioritize the repairs of apartments and community spaces. Additionally, City leaders must lead advocacy on the federal level to drastically turn around federal divestment in public housing, and ensure that New York City has enough resources to support its public housing stock.

Municipal Voting Rights

New York City is home to more than 3 million immigrants who contribute billions of dollars to our economy and expand the cultural and social vitality of our city. Despite their contributions, many immigrants cannot vote in local elections and have no say on the issues that affect their families the most. We are working with a growing coalition of organizations to advocate for the passage of Intro 1867, (also known as the *Our City, Our Vote* campaign) which would restore municipal voting rights to New York City residents with lawful presence. Under its terms, a noncitizen would be qualified to vote in municipal elections only if they are (1) a lawfully permanent resident or authorized to work in the United States; (2) a resident of New York City for at least 30 consecutive days; or (3) otherwise qualified to



register to vote under New York State election law once exempted from the requirement that they possess United States citizenship. Nearly 900,000 New Yorkers, who live, work, go to school, and raise families here, would gain the right to vote with the passage of this legislation. New York City must expand municipal voting rights to make our democracy stronger and more inclusive for the immigrants who are essential to the cultural and economic fabric of our great city.

Recommendation: The City Council and Mayor must support Intro 1867 to expand municipal voting rights to New York City's legal permanent residents and individuals with work authorization.



Neighborhood Organizations

Nonprofit neighborhood organizations like settlement houses connect residents to the services they need. In times of crisis and recovery, neighborhood organizations provide stability for individuals and their communities.

Settlement House Approach

Over the past 130 years, the reach and breadth of New York City's settlement house network has grown to include 40 organizations who offer a broad network of comprehensive services at 680 locations in all five boroughs. Settlement houses are committed to a holistic approach that addresses their neighbors' immediate needs, as well as the barriers that impede personal, family, and community stability. They recognize the interconnected relationship between housing, health, employment, education, self-esteem, and financial wellbeing, and they ensure all neighbors have access to a full range of resources to help them achieve wellness and life-long security. Each year, their programs collectively help 765,000 New Yorkers to thrive in school, make healthy life choices, succeed in educating themselves, become engaged citizens, stabilize their housing situations, and make the most of their senior years. Unfortunately, in recent years, siloed funding streams and expensive real estate have made it challenging for this proven settlement house model to grow and expand.

Recommendation: City leaders must ensure settlement houses have the tools and resources they need to thrive, including fair compensation for staff, fully funded contract services and indirect rates, access to capital, and prompt payment and flexible program designs. Further, the city must call on their expertise moving forward.

Human Services Infrastructure

Settlement houses play a key role in New York City's infrastructure. They are employers, service providers, and community builders, and have a collective budget of \$1 billion. Though these organizations were deemed essential during COVID-19, they were not given the tools, resources, or voice needed to effectively meet the mounting needs in their communities. Their expertise was not leveraged to address some of the most critical issues facing the city, like reopening schools, starting emergency food programs, and coordinating vaccination efforts. Their budgets were cut, particularly through the egregious cuts to the Indirect Cost Rate Initiative in 2020 and 2021.

A key part of the human services infrastructure is the workforce. Human services workers are over 80% women, and 44% are women of color. They are well-educated—41 percent have a four-year college degree and another 25 percent have an associates' degree or some college—and most work full-time or close to full-time schedules. Due to underfunding in government contracts, their staff are underpaid, sometimes needing to receive public benefits or take on second jobs to make ends meet.

Recommendation: City leaders must explore opportunities to support more comprehensive and flexible funding streams as well as identify ways to bring the settlement house approach into more communities throughout New York City.



Photo courtesy of Grand St. Settlement

100 Years of Advocacy



Founded in 1919 and rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH has helped improve the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live for over a century.



Salary parity for early childhood education staff

Since World War II, the community-based early childhood education workforce -- made up mostly of women of color -- had been paid salaries far lower than their colleagues in public schools. UNH was a driving force in conducting original research, working with elected officials, and, most importantly, organizing staff and parents to fight for fair salaries. In 2019, this resulted in a commitment from the City to increase salaries towards parity with the public schools.



Creating the Campaign for Summer Jobs

In response to a federal funding cut that threatened summer jobs for 50,000 young New Yorkers more than twenty years ago, UNH helped create a campaign to advocate for jobs for New York youth. The campaign successfully convinced New York State and City government to establish, fund, and grow the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).



Fighting for public housing

Settlement house leaders like Jacob Riis were among the first to draw attention to the plight of tenants living in dilapidated and unsafe housing conditions throughout the City. Settlement house leaders pushed for a public investment in urban housing and Mary Simkovich, the founder of UNH member Greenwich House and co-founder of UNH, was one of the first commissioners of the New York City Housing Authority.



Preventing isolation among older adults

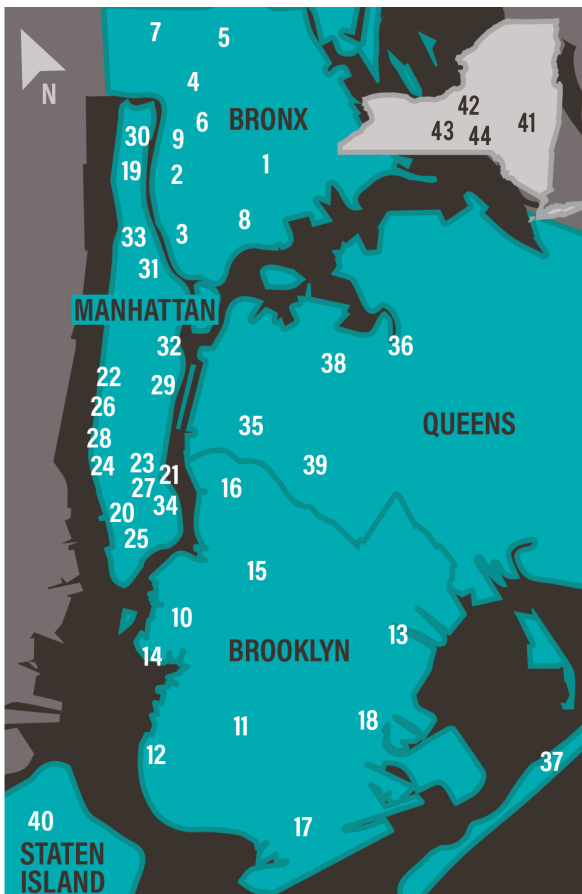
In a landmark 2006 study (updated in 2018) of isolation among older adults, UNH brought the issue of senior isolation to the forefront of policy discussions and spurred practitioners and government to develop practices to prevent isolation among older adults.

To learn more about our history, [click here to view our 2019 Centennial Report.](#)



About United Neighborhood Houses

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 44 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.



[Click here for a list of our 44 members.](#)

Our Mission

UNH stewards the settlement house movement in New York, mobilizing our members and their communities to protect and strengthen our most valuable resource: the neighborhoods we call home. UNH's mission is the same as when it was founded: to promote and strengthen the settlement house movement's neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers and the communities in which they live. Today, UNH's mission is achieved by:

Advocating at the City and State level for policy reforms, funding, and program designs that strengthen settlement houses and New York communities;

Customizing professional development and peer learning that builds the skills and capacity of settlement house staff at all levels; and

Mobilizing settlement houses and their communities to engage in civic participation including voter education and outreach.

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