

125 YEARS



HENRY STREET SETTLEMENT

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT,
PUBLIC POLICY, and ADVOCACY
FINDINGS from FOCUS GROUPS
and the COMMUNITY TOWN HALL**

APRIL 2018

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, Henry Street Settlement continued to build upon our legacy of community engagement by conducting our fourth annual neighborhood listening tour and Town Hall. Our community engagement team conducted dozens of focus groups with program participants and employees from our education and employment, health and wellness, transitional housing, and arts programs. In October 2017, our fourth annual Town Hall meeting brought together over 200 community members, Henry Street team members, and elected officials for an important afternoon of conversation.



This document summarizes our key findings in six major categories: Housing & Gentrification, Education, Employment, Public Safety & Quality of Life, the Arts, and Community Resources & Activities. These findings will enable us to refine our agency's advocacy agenda and to continue aligning our programs and priorities with the community's most pressing needs. The report is available electronically at henrystreet.org/about/advocacy.

HOUSING & GENTRIFICATION

WHAT WE HEARD:

- The Lower East Side and NYC are experiencing a severe affordable housing crisis. Residents fear being displaced from the neighborhood due to rising rents, insufficient affordable housing, and a rising cost of living.
- The neighborhood is being over-developed, and new developments are extremely expensive and cater to wealthy newcomers. Although many luxury developments offer “affordable” units, these are too few — and too costly — for low and middle-income Lower East Siders.
- The criteria used by the City to determine affordability are the main reason why “affordable” units remain out of reach for the majority of low-income New Yorkers.
- There are concerns about the way that these units are assigned through the City's affordable housing lottery system, HousingConnect, including its accessibility for non-English speakers and for people without computers. The process also leaves room for discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or personal history (such as educational background or history of substance abuse).
- The City should better advertise and explain new HousingConnect opportunities through outreach and community forums. Residents should receive more information on what qualifies them — or potentially disqualifies them — from applying for certain buildings and units.
- For those with vouchers to access permanent affordable housing, a common issue is that landlords do not accept vouchers or charge additional fees. City officials must enforce legal protections for tenants and ensure that vouchers actually lead to affordable housing.
- NYCHA residents said buildings are not cleaned and repairs are not made in a timely manner and that these issues are worsening.
- NYCHA residents want to know their rights with respect to repairs and other issues, and want more support when applying for units/unit transfers, filing complaints, getting repairs, etc.
- Residents of public and private housing shared concerns about the increasing cost of living in the Lower East Side. The opening of expensive businesses, and the closure of affordable

- ones —such as the Pathmark supermarket — signal that the neighborhood is becoming less affordable to longtime residents.
- Residents often have to make choices between saving money or spending it on housing, food, and other basic needs.
- The neighborhood lacks an affordable supermarket. While many shop outside the neighborhood, seniors and others who patronize the local Fine Fare complained about the store's unfair prices and lack of regard for its customers.
- New businesses opening in the neighborhood are expensive bars, restaurants, and hotels. They are unaffordable to many longtime residents, change the character of the neighborhood, and often disturb residents with noise and nightlife activity.

WHAT WE DO:

- Henry Street advocates for affordable housing development and other solutions to challenges affecting private housing, public housing, and shelter residents.
- We invite elected officials to visit Henry Street to hear directly from members of our community. We also organize Candidate Forums in advance of local elections so that our community can learn where candidates stand on issues that matter most to them.
- Through Henry Street's innovative shelter aftercare program, launched in 2015 in response to resident concerns about recidivism in the shelter system, we offer counseling and support to our shelter residents as they search for permanent housing, communicate with landlords, and settle into apartments citywide.
- Henry Street's Neighborhood Resource Center (281 East Broadway) offers case management, legal and financial counseling, and more for those seeking guidance on housing concerns.
- Henry Street teamed up with GOLES in 2017 to offer a series of housing workshops, including information sessions and application support clinics to help residents apply for the HousingConnect affordable housing lottery. We also offered workshops for NYCHA residents about how the NextGeneration program might impact them. The 2018 workshop series will cover topics — from heat, hot water, and repairs to succession rights and the re-certification process— for NYCHA residents.

- Henry Street is an experienced workforce development provider and co-founder of the Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN), a consortium of local nonprofits to connect Lower East Side residents with jobs created by local development, including those at Essex Crossing. To be connected to local jobs and employment services, visit Henry Street's Workforce Development Center at 99 Essex Street or call 212.478.5400.
- To support and promote small businesses, Henry Street offered a free Business Bootcamp in 2017. We are currently providing mentorship and start-up funds to a group of this Bootcamp's graduates, and plan to offer similar programs in the future.
- We encourage all interested in local development to attend Community Board 3 meetings. For information on how to get involved with Community Board 3, contact tderogatis@henrystreet.org.

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- Henry Street will compile a list of resources to help our community in their pursuit of safe, quality, affordable housing. Similarly, we will find ways to connect members of our community to campaigns, rallies, and other housing advocacy efforts that are happening citywide.
- Henry Street recognizes the impact of new development, especially at Essex Crossing and in the Two Bridges neighborhood. In addition to promoting local hiring through LESEN, Henry Street will make certain that residents are informed about and included in housing opportunities, job opportunities, and conversations pertaining to local developments.
- Henry Street will continue exploring ways to bring affordable food resources into the neighborhood.
- Henry Street will continue exploring partnerships with GOLES and other housing organizations to offer more free housing workshops, and to increase advocacy efforts.

SAFETY & QUALITY OF LIFE

WHAT WE HEARD:

- The declining quality of subway and bus service is a major source of frustration.
- The M22 bus is unreliable, and there's a need for better bus service in the neighborhood.
- Dirty streets, rats, and potholes make the area dangerous for residents, especially seniors.
- Drug activity and groups of young adults in parks make residents, especially those with young children, wary of using parks.
- Local police precincts should strengthen their relationship with the community by spending more time getting to know the area and residents.
- The areas that need to be patrolled are not receiving enough attention and police officers need more training on how to use de-escalation techniques and mediation skills with the youth and mentally ill populations, and in other potentially challenging situations.
- Some young people of color — particularly those living on Avenue D — have had many negative experiences with the police, and many are stopped frequently. During these interactions, youth have experienced aggressive questioning and searching, disrespectful treatment, and fear of the interaction turning violent.

WHAT WE DO:

- In 2017, Henry Street launched a Youth Opportunity Hub with support from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Through

close partnerships with five other Lower East Side settlement houses and other nonprofit partners, we created a "hub" of support, safety, and opportunity for young people in our community. The Youth Hub has social workers at nine program sites to link neighborhood service providers together to offer one-stop, comprehensive support for individuals ages 13 to 24 to prevent them from becoming involved in the criminal justice system. Young people are connected to education, recreation, mental health services, and other programs that promote their safety and well-being and, in turn, enhance the safety of our neighborhood.

- Henry Street's monthly Community Advisory Board meetings are a great place for community members to share concerns about neighborhood safety. Our Community Engagement Team and many CAB members attend Community Board meetings, local precinct meetings, elected officials' Town Halls, and other forums where community feedback can be shared and addressed. *For CAB information, please contact Talia DeRogatis at tderogatis@henrystreet.org*
- We offer Know Your Rights trainings in both our Boys & Girls Republic and Expanded Horizons programs to inform young people about their rights when interacting with police.
- We invite Community Affairs officers to many events, and two Neighborhood Coordination Officers (NCOs) attended our 2017 Town Hall. We are speaking with NCOs (from the 7th and 9th precincts and PSA 4) and community members to help improve relations. (NCOs get to know residents to build trust and improve communication between law enforcement and community members.)

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- Henry Street is in constant communication with our elected officials about the concerns of our community. We will share these findings with our elected officials, and will continue to organize Town Halls, Candidate Forums, and Community Advisory Board meetings as forums for discussing these problems and potential solutions.
- We will explore expanding Know Your Rights trainings and other opportunities to learn about interacting with law enforcement.
- Henry Street will explore ways to bring safety seminars, self-defense classes, and other resources to our Senior Center.

EDUCATION

WHAT WE HEARD:

- District 1 elementary, middle, and high schools are overcrowded, lack vital resources, and fail many of their students. Residents fear that large-scale housing development in the neighborhood will further crowd and stretch the resources of local schools.
- There is a lack of satisfactory middle and high school options in District 1, and the application process is difficult. Many parents expressed concerns about selecting schools, both due to their dissatisfaction with local options and the complexity of the selection process. Young people echoed concerns about the difficulty of the high school application process.
- Classrooms with ELL and special needs students do not have adequate resources to support these students.
- For non-English speaking families, communication with teachers and administrators was a major issue. Important school flyers, notices, and meetings are rarely translated. Parents also said their children had to translate during parent-teacher conferences.
- Youth from public schools shared frustrations with the type of learning offered in their classrooms: too

much emphasis on standardized testing, teaching that does not recognize different learning styles, and curricula that do not reflect the histories and diverse experiences of the students.

- Students feel that their concerns and feedback are not taken seriously and that counselors/administrators rarely address student feedback. Students in our Expanded Horizons program, for example, said their experiences and concerns about racism in their schools are not often addressed by school officials.
- Students agreed that college readiness and application support is minimal in public schools. One student shared that without Henry Street's Expanded Horizons she would be completely lost as a college applicant. Many students said SAT tutoring is the most important part of the college application process, tutoring that many low-income students cannot access.
- There is a need for more free, individualized tutoring support in the community — particularly for the SAT.

WHAT WE DO:

- Henry Street partners with District 1 to offer after-school programs, arts education, and mental health services in various schools. Visit www.henrystreet.org or call 212.254.3100 to learn more about our work in District 1 schools. Students and families not enrolled in our school-based programs can visit the new District 1 Family Resource Center, located at P.S. 15, to learn about programs and services in the district.
- Henry Street's Expanded Horizons College Success Program provides FREE college counseling, SAT tutoring, scholarship assistance, college trips, and more to students in grades 9 to 12. *For more information or to enroll, call 212.254.3100.*
- Henry Street also offers a Youth Leadership Council (YLC) for those interested in leadership development, social justice, and becoming advocates and change-makers in their communities. YLC members participate in monthly workshops and discussions, attend community meetings and rallies, and take part in other opportunities to develop their leadership skills and make a difference.
- One highlight of Henry Street's school-based programming is our Middle School Success Center at United Neighborhood Middle School, which uses peer mentorship to support middle school students and families through the high school application process. We hope the City will support and invest in similar services citywide.
- Henry Street is aware of the importance of providing support to special needs students and families, and we provide such support in our early childhood and after-school programs.
- Henry Street also recognizes the importance of offering language-appropriate services. Many of our early childhood and after-school team speak Spanish, Mandarin, and/or Cantonese, and we offer translation for parent meetings.

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- Henry Street hopes to bring in volunteer tutors to offer individualized support in a variety of subjects — including SAT prep — to more students. *If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Talia DeRogatis at tderogatis@henrystreet.org.*
- We will continue looking for ways to partner with District 1 to support and provide additional resources to students and families. In 2017 and 2018, for example, our Abrons Arts Center partnered with District 1 to host student art shows.
- Henry Street recognizes the importance of the college preparation services we offer through our Expanded Horizons program. In 2018, Expanded Horizons staff will work with Henry Street's Community Outreach Team to brainstorm new outreach strategies to engage more students in this free program.

EMPLOYMENT

WHAT WE HEARD:

- Young people are concerned about finding jobs and internships in areas that interest them. The age and experience requirement of fast food and retail jobs make even those difficult to get.
- Youth want more job readiness and job search support in order to find and be prepared for the opportunities that are available.
- One great way to get work experience is through the City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), but this program should be expanded to reach more students and still does not support students who need an income during the year.
- Employers seem to be requiring more and more education, training, and experience before hiring. For jobseekers of all ages, the bar is getting higher in terms of the degrees, technical skills, and industry-specific experience needed to be hired.
- Because of this, community members want a wider range of vocational and skill-based training opportunities offered locally.
- Participants in Henry Street's employment programs want help to find jobs in industries other than retail and food service.
- In our current labor market, it seems like you need to know someone or connect with someone personally in order to be hired. Many requested networking support, as well as guidance on how to utilize social media/networking sites and find community-based networking events to attend.

WHAT WE DO:

- Henry Street's Young Adult Internship Program, based at the Workforce Development Center and offered three times per year, serves 18 to 24-year-olds who are not currently enrolled in school or working. This comprehensive employment program provides job readiness training, HSE classes, personal advising, and an 11-week paid internship. *For more information, contact 212.478.5400.*
- Henry Street connects hundreds of youth to summer jobs through the Summer Youth Employment Program. We also train youth to help us advocate in Albany for increased funding for the program.
- Henry Street Settlement offers free employment assistance to people age 18 and above through our Job Essentials Training (JET) program. Services include one-on-one coaching, interview and resume prep, connection to trainings and certifications, networking workshops, and more. *To learn more, contact 212.478.5400.*
- Henry Street connects clients to vocational training opportunities and offers hospitality training in house, and hosted a "Training Fair" in March 2018. We will continue to explore ways to bring more industry-specific trainings to the community.
- Our Employment Services team is always seeking out new opportunities for our clients, building relationships with employers, and connecting clients to local jobs and other workforce development resources through our membership in LESEN.
- Henry Street offers beginner English language instruction and an innovative ESL-Job Readiness Program for more advanced English language learners (ages 18 and up) seeking to improve their language skills while preparing to find a job.
- In 2017, Henry Street offered a free Business Bootcamp to support emerging entrepreneurs and promote the growth of local, community-owned businesses. We are currently providing mentorship and start-up funding to an excellent group of this Bootcamp's graduates.

- Henry Street is a major employer on the Lower East Side, and we host Job Fairs to inform the community about job openings at the Settlement.

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- In response to feedback from in-school youth about their challenges finding a job, we will explore ways to incorporate more job readiness and job search assistance into our Expanded Horizons program.
- Henry Street recognizes the importance of reaching more members of our community with information about the range of our free employment services. In 2018, our Community Outreach Team will work closely with our employment program staff to brainstorm new outreach strategies to ensure that local residents know about and take advantage of these programs.
- Henry Street is hoping to offer more Business Bootcamps to help local residents start their own businesses.

THE ARTS

WHAT WE HEARD:

- The Abrons Arts Center has expanded family programming and affordable, culturally diverse arts classes, and we should continue working to increase the diversity of staff, classes, performances, and youth and family-friendly experiences at the Arts Center.
- Consider offering step dance, African dance, and music production/DJ classes.
- Some people are unaware of the tuition assistance offered at the Abrons. We should do more targeted outreach and marketing about tuition assistance to ensure that all members of our community can take our classes.
- Use the Abrons' outdoor amphitheater to host more youth and community events — such as open mic nights, block parties, public performances, and movie nights.
- The Abrons should create more performance opportunities for Abrons students, teachers, alumni, and LES residents in general.
- Henry Street and Abrons staff should make sure that all arts-related social media and marketing efforts are targeted toward a diverse audience. Arts terminology & marketing language used by the Abrons is not always accessible.
- Arts Center marketing materials should also be in Spanish and Chinese.
- Abrons Arts Center and Henry Street Senior Center should collaborate to bring more seniors to matinee performances.
- The Abrons should have a suggestion box so people can share feedback and programming ideas.

WHAT WE DO:

- The Abrons Arts Center team is always looking for ways to offer performances and classes that are exciting and affordable for our community. In response to community feedback, we have brought a diversity of arts programming to the Abrons and performances that cater to the whole family.
- Examples of these new offerings include the family-friendly holiday show *Jack & the Beanstalk* in December 2017 and the free LES community dance showcase in April 2018. Our class offerings now include hip-hop for youth and adults, salsa, tap dancing, and an impressive array of ballet, pointe, and modern dance that we offer at the Abrons through an exciting partnership with the East Village Dance Project.
- Through our PATHS program, Abrons teaching artists offer arts classes in Henry Street programs for seniors, youth and adults. Our 2017 “Perfect City” project, operated by playwright-

in-residence Aaron Landsman, provided stipends to Lower East Siders to participate in a collaborative, multi-disciplinary, and multi-performance exploration of city planning, gentrification, and the impacts of neighborhood change on the Lower East Side.

- Abrons has always worked to ensure the affordability of our classes, and no one is turned away because of the inability to pay. However, community feedback helped us to rethink how we offer and advertise tuition assistance. *To learn more about our sliding scale tuition assistance program, call 212.598.0400 or visit www.abronsartscenter.org.*
- In response to feedback, the Settlement activated our Arts Center's amphitheater with free community programs, including a summer Block Party, art shows for District 1 students and families, and an exciting season launch event—all free, open to the public, and complete with food, music, performances, and other arts activities. We also plan to renovate the amphitheater to make it more accessible.
- The Abrons Arts Center works closely with Henry Street's Community Outreach Team to spread the word about upcoming performances, classes, and tuition assistance. In 2017, we hosted pop-up outreach events throughout the neighborhood and look forward to doing more in 2018.

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- The Henry Street and Abrons teams know that there is always room to improve and continue expanding the diversity and accessibility of our performances and classes. We will offer more family-oriented and community programming, in response to feedback of our neighbors.
- We will put a comment/suggestion box at the Abrons front desk to encourage feedback.
- The Abrons Arts Center and Henry Street Outreach Teams will continue working together to ensure that more members of our community know about our arts offerings and are able to take advantage of them. We will explore new outreach and marketing strategies, and we will create a campaign to raise awareness about the Arts Centers' sliding scale tuition.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

WHAT WE HEARD:

- Forming a Community Outreach team was a good idea, but there are still community members unaware of many of Henry Street's free services. We need to find new ways to reach more people.
- Henry Street should increase the number of local businesses, resident leaders, and community partners with whom we interact to ensure that more community members get introduced and connected to Henry Street.
- Many community members—even those who are connected to some of Henry Street's services—do not know about the full scope of what we offer. Henry Street should strive to cultivate a better understanding of how all of Henry Street's programs are connected and ensure that participants in one program are aware of other programs, events, and opportunities throughout the Settlement. Some suggested that we produce a brochure of all Henry Street programs and services to create a more holistic understanding of our work and to connect people to information about how to get involved.
- We should improve and broaden social marketing and outreach efforts to reach more young people.
- There is a need for more free, drop-in community programming at Henry Street on the weekends, and these programs could be supported and run by volunteers.

- Suggested weekend activities included: fitness classes (yoga, Zumba, etc.), cooking/nutrition classes, hands-on computer classes (particularly at times convenient for seniors), arts & crafts (such as painting, jewelry-making, sewing), and organizing groups such as a Henry Street choir or Double Dutch Team.
- There is a need for more ESL classes in the community — particularly classes that teach basic, day-to-day language and conversation skills, are offered on weekends, and are open to undocumented immigrants.
- More lounge spaces for youth in the neighborhood are needed. Youth do not have enough places to spend time and receive supervision unless they enroll in and commit to specific programs. As the neighborhood continues to change, we need to come together to ensure that our youth have safe places to spend time and access resources.
- Henry Street should continue to explore different ways to bring the community together through free, fun, and family-oriented events such as block parties, food/cultural festivals, or volunteer opportunities.
- Residents thanked and congratulated Henry Street for its recent efforts to offer more regular community meetings and events in the neighborhood.
- Residents in Henry Street's shelters shared that one of the biggest challenges they face is finding childcare for infants and children under the age of three, as well as finding childcare during nontraditional hours. Without this vital resource, residents have more difficulty accessing employment and permanent housing, which extends their stay in shelter.

WHAT WE DO:

- In response to feedback about the need to expand outreach in the neighborhood, Henry Street formed a Community Outreach Team in January 2017. This three-person team reflects our commitment to reach as much of our community as possible with information about our programs and services. They conduct street outreach, build relationships with local residents and partners, attend community meetings, participate in local street festivals and NYCHA Family Days, and put our materials in local businesses, libraries, and other organizations throughout the neighborhood. *For more information, please contact outreach@HenryStreet.org.*
- In response to feedback we heard at our first annual Town Hall, Henry Street formed a Community Advisory Board (CAB) comprised of Lower East Side residents and Henry Street clients of diverse backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities. The CAB meets monthly to ensure that the Settlement maintains “an ear to the ground” and is truly receptive and responsive to the needs of our community. Since its formation in 2015, the CAB has become an integral part of Henry Street. CAB members have helped us plan and execute important community events, provided feedback that has shaped our work in crucial ways and, beginning in 2017, have been responsible for allocating \$5,000 of Henry Street's annual budget to important efforts throughout the Settlement. *For more information or to join the Henry Street Community Advisory Board, contact Talia DeRogatis at tderogatis@henrystreet.org.*
- Henry Street has hosted a wide variety of free community events — such as block parties, candidate forums, and Town Halls — during the past few years. We are already working with the CAB to plan free community events during the summer and fall of 2018.
- Henry Street hears, understands, and appreciates all of the feedback we've received about the importance of activating Henry Street spaces on the weekends. In addition to the work

we are already doing on the weekends at BGR, Cornerstone, 301 Henry Street, and other sites, we have launched a volunteer-run Saturday program at 301 Henry Street. While we are currently offering dance, fitness, and entrepreneurship classes, we are looking for volunteers to bring additional free programs and activities — such as tutoring, yoga, and other suggestions from our community — to 301 Henry Street on the weekends. *If you want to volunteer or know anyone who might, please contact Talia DeRogatis at tderogatis@henrystreet.org.*

- We encourage community members to take advantage of the many low-cost activities offered at the Abrons Arts Center, including yoga, dance, painting, teen nights, and teen collectives.
- Henry Street also offers basketball clinics, tournaments, and open gym at two of our sites: 301 Henry Street and the Boys & Girls Republic (BGR). At both BGR (888 East Sixth Street) and 301 Henry Street, there is open gym on Monday and Wednesday evenings, Friday night basketball clinics, and Saturday basketball leagues in the spring, summer, and fall. *For more information, contact BGR at 212.686.888 and 301 Henry Street at 212.254.3100.*
- At both BGR and our Jacob Riis Cornerstone site at 80 Avenue D, Henry Street runs a free evening program for young people ages 12-19 and offers a game room, computer lab, academic support and tutoring, and more.
- Our ATTAIN computer lab, at 301 Henry Street, offers free computer skills training, certification courses, and open lab hours for the community. *For more information, call 212.771.6048.*

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- We agree with community feedback that there is always room to improve our outreach and marketing efforts and to ensure that more community members know about and take advantage of all that Henry Street offers. In the coming year, we will focus specifically on enhancing our social media efforts, expanding our outreach efforts, and producing a brochure of all of Henry Street's programs and service offerings.
- Henry Street recognizes the importance of upcoming elections in 2018, and we hope to make voting as accessible to our community as possible. In the coming months, Henry Street will explore ways to offer voter registration and education at our programs as well as at Henry Street sites and events throughout the neighborhood.
- Henry Street is exploring ways to have volunteers offer drop-in English-language instruction on weekends for those unable to attend our weekday ESL programs. *Interested in volunteering? E-mail tderogatis@henrystreet.org.*
- If you have any suggestions for additional recreational, artistic, educational, and other programs and activities that you would like to see offered at Henry Street, contact Henry Street's Community Outreach Team at outreach@henrystreet.org.



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