



20 Years On: Henry Street Remembers

9 / 11

September 11, 2001, started with a whirlwind of activity, like any other day at Henry Street. Preschool children bounded into their classrooms. Meals on Wheels trucks were filled to their roofs. Workforce clients arrived at their appointments.

Yvette Rodriguez, a senior grants accountant, had just dropped off her son at school and turned onto Henry Street when she saw it: “I thought it had been some kind of explosion, but then I saw the second plane make the turn; it seemed like slow motion. Some people dropped to their knees.”

“As we stood together in the middle of Henry Street and watched the first tower fall, it was surreal for everyone,” says CEO David Garza, an employment counselor at the time. “Regardless of the cause, for us, the question was not *‘What happened?’* but *‘What do we do next?’* It was a characteristically Henry Street response, which was repeated during the COVID-19 crisis: We listened intentionally and acted instinctually, supporting our community and our team, figuring it out as we went. There was never a doubt that we would be back to work the next day. It was all about keeping the doors open and how we could help.”

As the following newsletter reprinted from 2002 vividly describes, each Henry Street program kicked into gear, from providing water, food, and clothing to the dazed, soot-covered survivors who streamed through the Lower East Side, to ensuring seniors’ meals were delivered uninterrupted despite closed streets, to opening the Abrons Arts Center as a site for makeshift memorials.

The impact of 9/11 transformed the Settlement

well beyond that day. During the fall of 2001, in response to the dislocation of hundreds of workers from Lower Manhattan, Henry Street launched an emergency employment clearinghouse. That led to the creation of the Neighborhood Resource Center, in 2002, and the Workforce Development Center, in 2003. “9/11 made tangible something we had long understood,” Garza says. “People may have a presenting need, such as unemployment, but other needs are often attached, whether it’s child care, rental assistance, health insurance, or training to get the job. Having comprehensive support for income stability, mobility, and prevention all in one place is lifechanging.”

An outgrowth of labor-market changes was the need for English classes, particularly for Asian Americans who had worked in the devastated garment industry. Henry Street began providing ESOL combined with job training in the homecare program the agency ran.

“Crises of catastrophic proportions drive partnerships, creativity, and innovation,” Garza notes, “and reveal the need for changes in the service delivery structure. Subsequent tragedies like Hurricane Sandy and now COVID-19 have presented different—but similarly transformative—opportunities to better serve our community. Acting as first responders is baked into our organizational DNA, and I’m profoundly grateful that our team brings heroic levels of dedication and commitment to the Settlement, in times of crisis and on a daily basis.”

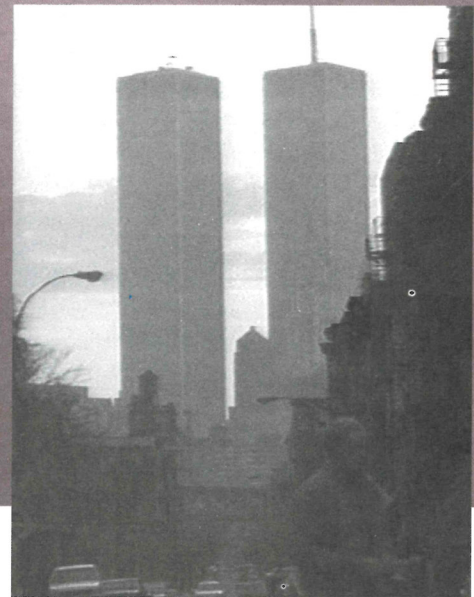
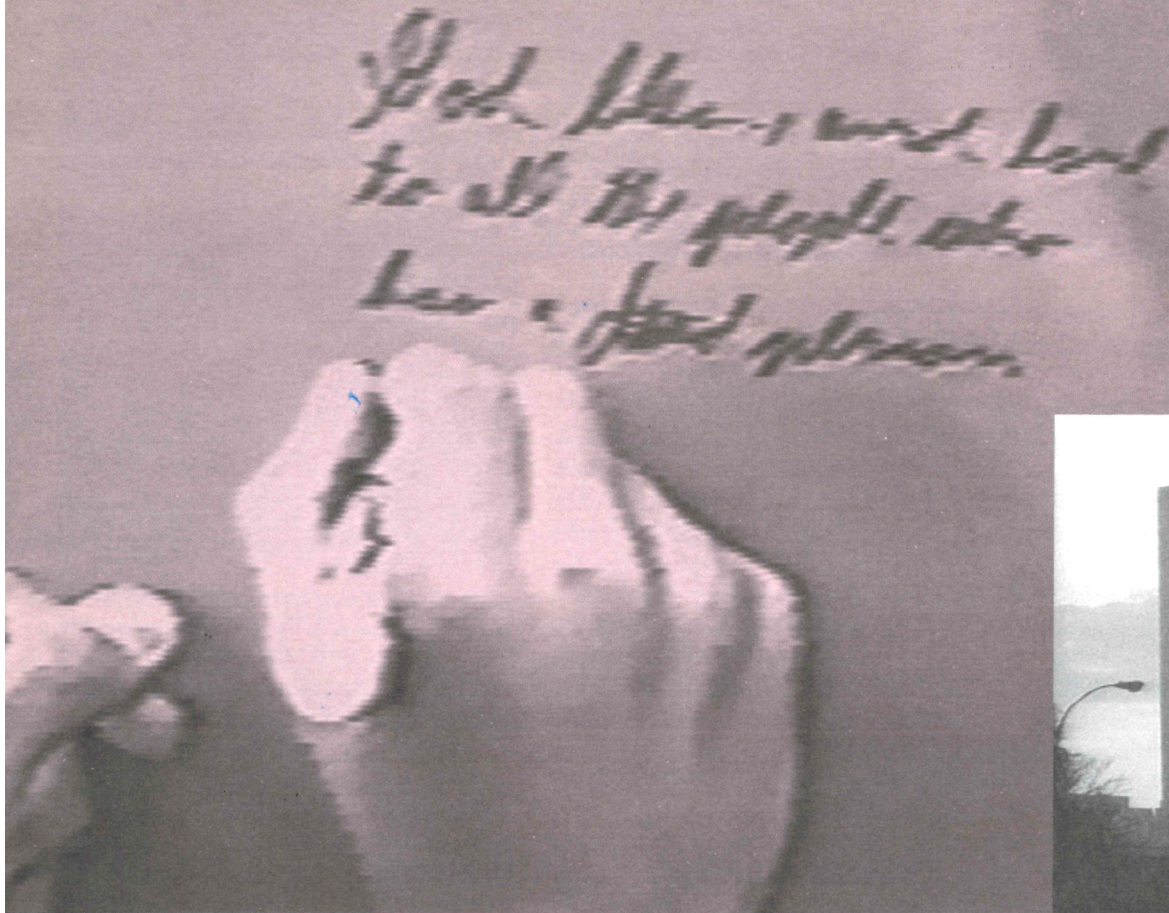
The Settlement extends ongoing sympathy to our team members and neighbors whose losses are still acutely felt 20 years after that tragic day.

Reprinted from
Spring 2002

News from Henry Street

265 Henry Street, New York, NY 10002 212.766.9200

Spring 2002



Channel L Working Group

Henry Street Responds to 9/11

Before September 11th, if you stood in front of the Settlement's headquarters on Henry Street, you had a glorious view of the World Trade Center towers, rising high above the quiet, residential streets of the Lower East Side neighborhood.

That view was irrevocably altered on 9/11, as was our world. Henry Street was in the direct path of the thousands of men and women who fled downtown after the attacks, in search of safety, their families, and comfort. Since that defining morning, Henry Street has played a criti-

cal role in sustaining its community through this tragedy and its aftermath.

On the morning of September 11th, as the first wave of people came running up the streets, Henry Street reacted quickly.

“Our immediate response was ‘How can we help?’ All other activity ceased,”

notes Lorraine Ahto, Chief Administrator of the Community Consultation Center (CCC). At the CCC, participants from

the Day Treatment Program established comfort stations on the streets for people to rest and collect themselves. Everyone needed water, and the CCC went through at least a dozen six-gallon jugs. They took clothes from their retail boutique, The Unlimited, and handed them out to men and women whose clothes were torn and covered in ash.

All over the Settlement, programs were providing whatever assistance was needed. At the Arts Center, people used bathrooms, called loved ones, and got

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Photographs on this page and the front page are stills taken from two videos, "You Are Not Alone," which was created to document and commemorate life after September 11th on the Lower East Side, and a Channel L Working Group video.

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water, coffee, and refreshments. The Arts Center's gallery space also became the site of instantaneous memorials to those lost. Henry Street's Senior Center became a refuge for fleeing downtown workers, seniors, and neighborhood residents who came together for lunch, met with counselors, and comforted each other. At 281 and 265 Henry Street, staff handed out sandwiches and more water to the evacuating workers. "Everyone was in shock," said one Henry Street case worker,

"We just automatically tried to provide as much comfort as possible."

Social workers from all of Henry Street's divisions were on-hand to provide crisis counseling.

In the weeks and months that followed the attacks, Henry Street has worked through numerous obstacles to respond to the needs of a community that is still reeling from losing loved ones, witnessing tragedy, experiencing sharp economic repercussions, and coping with insecurity. For at least a month following September 11th, Henry Street was cut off from the rest of the city. Telephone lines were down. A maze of roadblocks and security checks all but stopped traffic and halted deliveries. The economic toll the attacks took in Chinatown, and across New York City, are severely impacting

Henry Street's programs, and will continue to do so for a long time.

In Senior Services, an immediate concern after the attacks was ensuring that meal delivery would continue to nearly 500 homebound seniors. With streets closed and fresh food scarce due to the roadblocks, working conditions were less than ideal. When food supplies ran out, Henry Street's workers delivered food boxes provided by the City Meals-on-Wheels Program and Bloomberg Communications. Their work was critical. One meal recipient expressed her gratitude for Henry Street's perseverance by writing *The Daily News*, saying,

"Despite black smoke, closed streets and silent phones, I received every meal, even on September 11th. The (meal deliverers) must be added to the list of magnificent heroes. It means so much to me to hear a friendly knock on my door, see a smiling face, and receive a hot meal and some nice words."

The Good Companions Senior Center became an important hub for residents to gather, share news, and support each other.



"Residents needed the chance to leave their apartments, turn off the ceaseless news coverage, and be with other people,"

notes Janet Fischer, Chief Administrator of Senior Services. Good Companions established small language-based support groups that were held daily during the early days of the crisis. The groups, which now meet weekly, are held in English, Chinese, and Spanish and have proven to be positive ways for seniors to come together and help to ease each other's fears and anxieties.

The repercussions of the events on the children and teens in our community are still evolving says Nilisa Pietri, Chief Administrator of Henry Street's Youth Services. Two young adults in one of Henry Street's youth employment programs were pruning trees in Battery Park on the morning of September 11th. They stayed in the area for much of the day, assisting police and firefighters; however

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both have needed intensive counseling to cope with the horrific and graphic terror they were so close to that day.

Henry Street's Cultural Harmony Youth Theater Project is devoting this season to writing an interactive play about the terrorist attacks. By performing to audiences of their peers, these teens will start important conversations about everything from their initial reactions and fears, to their feelings about racial profiling and promoting tolerance in the community.

The need for counseling has also been felt by Henry Street's mental health clinic. Following the attacks, the clinic assigned two social workers to provide on-the-spot crisis intervention counseling and referrals to long-term counseling to those who needed it. In addition, the CCC extended its hours, opening one hour earlier and closing one hour later in the evening to accommodate walk-ins. Since the CCC can provide counseling in seven different languages, it accepted many referrals from the Red Cross, Life Net, and other agencies that had clients who needed culturally appropriate counseling.

For Shelter Services, the days following the attacks were stressful ones, notes Chief Administrator Verona Middleton Jeter. Many of the division's caseworkers depend on the phones to make calls and provide informal counseling to their clients who have moved from the shelters to new homes and jobs. Often the phone line is a lifeline. Yet, for weeks following the attacks, Shelter Services' phones were erratic. "Our case workers made a lot of home visits during this time, and tried to keep in touch using cell phones," explains Jeter.

The economic impact that the attacks—in conjunction with a declining economy—have had on Henry Street's programs is especially severe.

"Business has slowed in our Mailing Services, we are getting less customers. It is also going to be harder to place some of our job-training program graduates in jobs in this tighter economy,"

says Jeter. Across the Settlement, deep cuts are expected in programs as the City and State attempt to reduce their deficits,

and resources are redirected to building Lower Manhattan.

Despite the grim forecast, Henry Street plans to inspire recovery. This spring, the Arts Center will honor the spirit and generosity of Lower Manhattan through an art show. "We wanted to offer something that will bring the community together and promote healing," notes Jane Delgado, the Chief Administrator of the Abrons Arts Center.

"There is still a long road ahead. We are just beginning to see the economic repercussions the events of this fall will have on our programs and on the lives of the people we serve. But, Henry Street has proven its resiliency and its ability to provide support and hope. People can rely on us."

—Daniel Kronenfeld, *Executive Director*

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Reprinted from Spring 2002

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Henry Street



*News from Henry Street is published by
Henry Street Settlement Development Office.
Writers: Jane Donahue Design: Mindy Lang*