



# HENRY STREET SETTLEMENT

## COVID-19 IMPACT REPORT





# Thank You

Dear Friends,

Henry Street Settlement's founder, Lillian Wald, defined our most important guiding principle 127 years ago: "In times of need, act." Well, the past six months at the Settlement have seen a rapid and robust execution of that blueprint statement. Our emergency response has engaged every Henry Street program, every team member, and every resource like no crisis has in a generation.

Since mid-March 2020, we have provided 400,000 meals to our neighbors and continue to do so at a rate of 12,000 meals a week. We've answered 830 Helpline calls; phoned 600 seniors a week to ensure their safety; created summer employment opportunities for 475 young adults; and continue to provide extensive education, workforce, mental health, and arts programming online. This is our "new normal," and I'm immensely proud of the work our team has done.

As I write you, Henry Street is at a crossroads in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic catastrophe facing our community. While the photo ops and the drop-by food and mask donations are fading away, we look ahead toward a deepening crisis and further hardship—and the real, long-term work begins. Our response to these overlapping issues will be a marathon, not a sprint, and we need your help more than ever.

It is the steadfast support of our board, donors, volunteers, and corporate and community partners that has made this work possible and positions us to continue to be here for our community.

The needs of the individuals and families we serve will always show us the way forward, and we invite you to remain with us on this journey.

**Justice. Peace. Health. Hope.**

*David Garza, President & CEO, Henry Street Settlement*

## The Numbers Tell the Story

(March 15 to September 30, 2020)



**400,000** meals delivered



**\$225,000** emergency cash assistance distributed



**210** essential workers onsite every day, contributing **112,585** hours of service



**830** helpline callers assisted



**5,700** volunteer phone calls to seniors



**88** jobseekers placed in new jobs **AND 475** youth in summer jobs





# THE COVID-19 CRISIS SENT OUR COMMUNITY INTO A FREEFALL.

**The Lower East Side—dynamic, historic, and vibrant—has long been a place of intense struggle.**

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, half of children lived at or below the poverty line, and more than a third of households received food stamps—nearly double the city average. The neighborhood has some of the most extreme pockets of income inequality in all of New York City.

As New York City locked down, our team began hearing from neighbors in significant distress: a laid-off undocumented worker with no money for food or diapers for his baby; an older, Chinese-speaking woman with COVID-19 symptoms, uncertain of where to turn; an immunocompromised woman unable to go out and get groceries. Henry Street began surveying thousands of its clients and program participants, revealing widespread fear.

*Here is how  
we responded.*

## *Launching a Helpline*

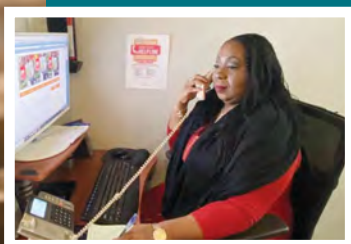
### **The final two weeks of March 2020 were marked by upheaval and adaptation,**

at Henry Street and around the world. As New York City locked down, our team began hearing from neighbors in significant distress: a laid-off undocumented worker with no money for food or diapers for his baby; an older, Chinese-speaking woman with COVID-19 symptoms, uncertain of where to turn; an immunocompromised woman unable to go out and get groceries.

In the midst of this massive change, Henry Street's 127-year-old settlement-house blueprint showed us the way forward: to listen intently and act instinctively, responding to immediate needs while also reaching into the community to understand where to best target our resources.

The Settlement quickly identified 22 caseworkers to launch a Helpline—one phone number where any New Yorker could get instantly connected with a helper trained in myriad situations. The Settlement took its first Helpline call the morning of April 1, and has responded to more than 800 calls since.

Helpline workers have assisted callers with unemployment insurance, emergency financial resources, remote-learning tools for their children, free WiFi, ESOL classes, and COVID testing sites, but by far the most common issue facing callers has been food access. With 90% of Helpline callers experiencing food insecurity, it was the recognition of this profound need that led Henry Street to open three new food pantries and to secure funding for several emergency cash funds.



## **By far the most common issue facing callers has been food access.**



## Three Squares for Our Shelter Residents

**“When I first absorbed the threat of the coronavirus crisis—even before it was apparent in New York City, I thought of the most vulnerable people among us, including those living in our four homeless shelters. How would we protect them?”** says David Garza, Henry Street president and CEO. **“This could have been a disaster.”**

Most of the families in our shelters rely on school-based breakfast and lunch for their children, as well as snacks in our afterschool programs. When it looked as though schools—and thus afterschool—would close, Matthew Phifer, our VP of education & employment, had an “aha” moment. We would engage the vendor who supplies afterschool snacks to hundreds of children in these programs to prepare three meals a day for the 600 people living in our shelters. Just as is the case with higher-income people who had the luxury of staying at home, these residents would not need to leave home for groceries.

With funding from a variety of sources, including many individual donors, Henry Street is continuing to provide meals to those in our shelters.



## Creating a New Food Access Initiative



### Making Four Food Pantries from Scratch

With food insecurity quickly rising to the top of the list of COVID-related issues impacting New Yorkers, Henry Street did what it does best: it responded, opening up three emergency food pantries that by the end of September had supplied more than 13,500 bags and boxes of nutritious food to more than 1,000 of our neighbors. The pantries complement Henry Street's Meals on Wheels program and citywide seniors food distribution.

Under the umbrella of the Henry Street Settlement Food Access Initiative, these pantries deliver food to homebound isolated seniors, immunocompromised people, those who have lost their livelihoods, and some with a combination of these issues. The staff of the pantries has been drawn largely from people whose Henry Street jobs can't be performed during this time, such as Abrons Arts Center theater workers and afterschool program staff.

Two of the pantries expand on the efforts of the Lower East Side organization Vision Urbana and are based out of our Boys & Girls Republic community center on East Sixth Street and Education Services Building at 301 Henry Street. Another is located within Henry Street's Senior Services programs and staffed by volunteers and Henry Street team members. For four weeks, we also provided groceries to families through our Jacob Riis Cornerstone youth program on Avenue D.



## Expanding Meals on Wheels

Henry Street Settlement operates Manhattan's largest Meals on Wheels program, with 30 delivery staff members fanning out across the city up to 59th Street every weekday. The program, in operation since the 1960s, is a lifeline for many older people and those with physical or mental disabilities that prevent them from shopping or preparing meals themselves.

In March 2020, Henry Street's caseload shot up from 1,400 people—mostly those in their 80s and 90s—to 2,200. "Pretty much every senior was eligible now," says Cindy Singh (pictured at right), the program director, who has been with Henry Street for 11 years. "There was desperation from the seniors when they were calling for food."

For most of Henry Street's new Meals on Wheels clients, the extreme risks of COVID-19 created profound logistical challenges: suddenly, leaving home was not an option, and friends or family who once brought over meals were not able to do so. "This was a lifeline," Singh says.



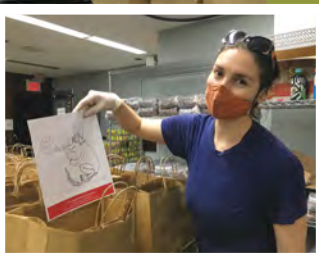
**"The people who come to deliver are always so graceful. I give them 100 A+."**

—AIDA VAZQUEZ, MEALS ON WHEELS RECIPIENT



**"This work fits really well with the artist community. We already have a feeling of mutual support, and this feels like part of it. Everybody is glad to have an outlet for that energy that they're not able to express otherwise."**

—JON HARPER, ACTING DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE FOOD DISTRIBUTION



## From Playing Parts to Shopping Carts: Redeploying Our Team

Food, shelter, employment, health care, and the arts are all fundamental to human well-being, and the COVID-19 crisis revealed like never before how these essential elements intersect within our organization—as we redeployed workers from across programs to address emergent needs.

When our Abrons Arts Center suspended in-person arts activities, Henry Street knew that the logistics skills of its theater operations director, Jon Harper, could be extremely valuable to the new food pantry in formation. Jon stepped up to run the show, along with a team of Abrons staffers, freelance theater tech workers, and volunteers, who are running one of the most important and quickly assembled programs Henry Street has ever undertaken.

▶ "Stretching dollars and creative problem solving are things we're trained to do in theater. There are parallels to the people we're working with, who are scraping by and making do," says Kaylyn Kilkuskie, stage manager.

Cross-agency redeployment took on many forms: Afterschool and Jobs Plus employees jumped in to deliver Meals on Wheels, and an ESOL teacher and social workers from all over the agency were assigned to the Helpline. On top of that, one of our chief fundraisers coordinated this redeployment job corps.



# Providing a Lifeline: Emergency Cash Assistance

**Ms. D. was down to her last \$600. The Guinean immigrant had joined her husband in the United States just six months earlier, leaving an infant and toddler behind while she saved enough money to reunite with them. With no idea of how to find a job—and shy even in her native French—she had been referred by a friend to Henry Street’s ESOL classes and Workforce Development Center, which helped her assemble a resume and connected her to a hotel housekeeping job.**

Soon Ms. D. was making beds and scrubbing tile at a Canal Street hotel, but just as the coronavirus pandemic struck, she found out she needed to have surgery. Ms. D. was still recovering at home on March 31 when she heard from the hotel: “We have bad news for you; the hotel is closed.” There was no sick pay.

With her husband out of work and deemed ineligible for unemployment benefits at first, she knew she had to find money. Then Henry Street called. “Hi Ms. D.! Are you working now?” asked Ned Gardner, who had been her ESOL teacher. He went on to tell her that she might be eligible for emergency cash assistance.

In April 2020, Henry Street launched several emergency cash assistance funds. With the largest fund, created with \$175,000 from Robin Hood, the Settlement was able to provide

assistance of up to \$2,000 to nearly 100 individuals who had lost their jobs, including undocumented immigrants and others who were ineligible for unemployment insurance. Henry Street is just one recipient of Robin Hood’s emergency cash grants, totaling a remarkable \$16.3 million.

With initial funding from the Source of Hope Foundation through Board Member Pilar Crespi Robert—which was soon augmented by additional funders—Henry Street was also able to provide 133 smaller grants of approximately \$150 to help program recipients and Helpline callers with immediate needs such as groceries or cleaning supplies. Henry Street also provided 116 emergency grants of up to \$500 to artists and arts workers, many of whom were among the first to lose their jobs amid the crisis.

For days after she spoke with Ned, Ms. D. watched her phone. Then, “he called me and asked if I had Zelle [the banking app]. I said yes. Oh my God, when I saw the money I was very, very happy. \$2,000. If I had no money left, I have no idea what I would have done.”

Ms. D.’s first thought was of her children in Guinea, for whom she sends home money for diapers and food. Then she took care of her own grocery needs, rent, and electricity. In July, just after being approved for unemployment benefits, she was called back to her job at the hotel. Now, she dreams of saving enough money to bring her children to the United States.

“Henry Street is the best I’ve found in the United States. I’m very, very happy,” she says.

**“If I had no money left, I have no idea what I would have done.”**



## A Groundswell of Volunteerism Is Keeping Seniors Safe

No population has borne the brunt of the coronavirus pandemic more than senior citizens—from those infected with the virus in nursing homes to others living alone and kept at bay from their loved ones. Thankfully, when the pandemic erupted, Henry Street's Senior Services division—which comprises the Senior Center, Meals on Wheels, Senior Companion Program, and a NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community), all based at the Vladeck Houses on the Lower East Side—was ready to act.

The most urgent need was to feed hundreds of seniors who had been coming to the Senior Center for daily lunch and dinner. In early March, Henry Street transitioned to handing out grab-and-go meals; several weeks later, meal services were folded into a citywide senior meals-delivery program.

To fill in the gaps for people ineligible for Meals on Wheels or who have additional needs, Henry Street created a senior food pantry, where in May volunteers began providing bagged groceries to local residents. **One special touch: volunteers are dropping arts and crafts supplies into each bag with a prompt to brighten up the recipients' weeks!**

Staff and volunteers also began making weekly phone calls, checking in on seniors' mental and physical well-being and making sure they were well equipped for the week ahead. The outpouring of interest in volunteering at Henry Street has been a bright spot amid the pandemic. Weekly chats have become a treasured connection for our volunteers and clients alike, and have helped dozens of Senior Center participants log onto Zoom for exercise classes, drawing, Chinese dance, and introductions to new recipes.



**"A highlight of volunteering is when food recipients answer the door to someone from Henry Street. Instantly everything is okay and they know they are taken care of."**

**—VOLUNTEER LISA MEHOS**

## Meet Our Essential Onsite Workers

**Two hundred ten essential onsite workers have continued to report to their Lower East Side program sites throughout the pandemic.** They include Henry Street's Transitional & Supportive Housing and Meals on Wheels teams, maintenance staff, and those operating food pantries—making sure to meet clients' rapidly changing needs.

Working at home was not an option for many team members. In our shelters, resident assistants and security team members have staggered their schedules to allow for social distancing at work and while commuting. Staff wear masks and gloves and are careful not to share pens and clipboards.

"We quickly changed what the day-to-day looks like," says Domestic Violence Program Director Nicole Lee, adding that her team has been exceptionally dedicated and motivated throughout the crisis.

**The top priority was figuring out how to give residents—including children doing remote schoolwork—the support they needed, by phone or at a social distance.**

"For those who came to work every day, there was uncertainty and fear, not knowing what we would face each day," Lee says. But showing up in a catastrophe is what she signed up for when she became a social worker, she says.

Meals on Wheels driver and team leader Linda White saw her Lower Manhattan route grow from 60 to 95 people in several weeks. In the heat of the summer, the program drew staff from paused programs, such as afterschool, to meet a 40% increased caseload.

White and other delivery workers leave bags of food outside of apartment doors, stepping away as people open their doors. "We have to socially distance, but sometimes I ask my clients through the door or window how they're doing," White says.

"I've felt very lucky to be an essential worker," she adds, "lucky to be able to work with the elderly and provide meals for them." White did not visit her mother and other family for four months to protect them from possible exposure.

The backbone of Henry Street's essential operations are 50 maintenance workers, who have worked non-stop to clean shared spaces; build protective devices; and constantly transport food, PPE, and other materials among buildings. **We thank them from the bottom of our hearts!**



**Fifty dedicated maintenance workers, like Elsa Dias, above, have continued to report to work daily.**

## Moving Programs Online

The coronavirus pandemic pushed the pause button on uncountable activities and services in our city, but Henry Street's doors have remained open.

Many services have moved online to ensure the safety of all participants. Team members nimbly adapted to the technology, remaining connected to program participants, with a lot of help from our Facilities and IT departments.



Jobseekers moved to Zoom for employment programs such as Job Essentials Training, Jobs Plus Lower East Side, the ATTAIN Computer Lab, and ESOL & HSE classes.



After-school and evening programs, Expanded Horizons college preparation, summer day camp, and early childhood education all moved to online platforms to stay connected (and we are pleased to report that in-person pre-K is back in session!).



Mental health, senior services, and the Parent Center all went remote and have been able to provide substantial services—from counseling to exercise classes—online.



Abrons Arts Center's vast catalog of performances is available via Vimeo, and all arts classes moved online.

## How to Donate

Since 1893, Henry Street has seen our community through the ups and downs of history, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. The Settlement could not have pivoted so quickly and effectively if not for our supporters. Individual donations are the backbone of the organization, providing crucial flexibility and enabling us to meet the dynamic needs of our neighbors.

Donate at [henrystreet.org](https://henrystreet.org) to help us continue to open doors of opportunity for all New Yorkers.

Contact [info@henrystreet.org](mailto:info@henrystreet.org) with any questions about donating.

The only way through this crisis is together.

Here's how you can help.

