

# Legacy OF LIGHT



*University Settlement: 1886-2011*

A History of Social Change

Celebrating 125 Years  
**Innovation for a Lifetime**



University Settlement Society of New York  
184 Eldridge Street, New York, NY 10002

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## Preface

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University Settlement is America's first social settlement house, and the second in the world, first opening its doors to the low-income and immigrant population in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1886. Today the organization serves more than 25,000 people at 21 sites throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn with a range of services including early childhood education and support for new parents, after-school programs, language classes, eviction prevention services, mental health support, services for older adults, arts programming and more.

The following pages detail the history of University Settlement's first 125 years, from 1886 to 2011. The first section was written by the current Chief Executive Officer, Michael H. Zisser, who has held this position since 1988. The second section - University Settlement's First Century - was written by historian and longtime Settlement supporter Jeffrey Scheuer and originally published in 1986.

While the neighborhoods University Settlement serves, languages it hears and faces it sees have changed many times in the past 125 years, the spirit of what the Settlement does remains the same: to work *with* people as they make their way to a better life and create a stronger, more vibrant community.

# LEGACY OF LIGHT:

University Settlement's  
Second Century

## Legacy of Light: University Settlement's Second Century

Originally published in 1986, *Legacy of Light* beautifully described the history of the Settlement's first 100 years within the social context that affected and was affected by the Settlement's involvement with the City and larger society. University Settlement and the settlement movement were powerful forces during the Progressive Era, during the critical years framed by the two World Wars, and throughout the formation of the Great Society and War on Poverty era.

What has been the context of the past twenty-five years, and what can we expect next?

While University Settlement's mission has remained the same, the past twenty-five years have seen a shift in the context in which we operate. There has been a dramatic increase in the number and scale of programs sponsored by the public sector – either as entitlement programs or as targeted programs serving a particular need or population. A more engaged government, irrespective of political orientation, has led to a sizeable expansion of the role and financial capacity of the non-profit sector. University Settlement, and the communities we serve, have benefitted from this growth in the public sector in many areas. The country has also generated increased wealth for many individuals and corporations, which in turn has led to substantial increases

in charitable giving – again benefitting the Settlement's expanded activities.

But several forces have worked in opposition to this growth. Periodic fiscal crises have created damaging downturns in the economy, which always affect lower income families far more dramatically than families with more resources. Many areas of the country have become increasingly fiscally conservative, one result of which is that downsizing resources for publically supported programs has become a powerful rallying message. The progress made in tackling critical social issues may suffer national setbacks if an appropriate balance of resources and government investments is not resolved.

The larger context has NOT changed in two important matters. First, more than at any point in the country's history, this is a nation of immigrants. University Settlement began in the golden age of immigration in the late 19th century, but in fact a greater percentage of our population today is represented by first and second generation immigrants. Second, there is not as yet full equality in how voices are weighted on key questions affecting our local and national communities. Advocacy with and on behalf of those whose voices need to be heard with greater prominence has always been and will continue to be part of University Settlement's mission.

The story of the past twenty-five years is one of transformation and reaffirmation. It is the story of a neighborhood comeback through community activism and the partnership of many across the public and private sectors. It is also the story of an organization that embodies

strength and stability, agility and flexibility – qualities that have shepherded the Settlement's transition from a 19th century model into a 21st century institution.

### **A Neighborhood and Settlement in Transition: 1986-1996, A Period of Rebuilding and Reaffirmation**

The Lower East Side has been a place of continuous change since it first became a home to new immigrants arriving in the United States in the 19th century. In 1986, University Settlement had served the community through 100 years of shifting demographics, changing cultures, and the continuous presence of challenging social needs. The first decade of our second century was to be a critical time of transition for both the Settlement and the community.

A variety of social issues were having a strong impact on community residents and on the institutions working with the community. Criminal activities and drug use were spreading major negative effects across the city, and certainly on the Lower East Side. Many of our street corners and parks served as meeting points for drug dealers and prostitutes. Teenage gangs, representing all the local nationalities, were actively fighting each other and intimidating local residents. Bricked up abandoned buildings, including a few on Eldridge Street, were home to dealers selling their merchandise through holes in the cinder-block facades. And perhaps most troublesome,

these abandoned buildings were steadily deteriorating at the same time that land speculators were preparing to acquire them for future re-development.

But there were also powerful, committed, and creative forces of renewal beginning to emerge. Community activists were reclaiming the streets and parks from the dealers and vagrants; housing activists were working to renovate and repair old buildings or planning for construction of new subsidized and supportive housing; and social activists were fighting for the preservation and expansion of vital social service, educational and cultural programs critical to a healthy community.

University Settlement and its families directly felt and witnessed the negative forces affecting the community, but also understood the necessity of building upon the underlying strengths of the community. Our collective response was to aggressively pursue a renewed vision of the Settlement and an expanded engagement with local residents. The period from 1986 -1996 became the decade of rebuilding and reaffirmation of the Settlement's role and the Settlement tradition.

Fighting to protect quality of life and strengthening the community were top priorities. Two illustrative examples best describe this strategy. **Project Home** was established in 1986, designed to provide support services to families moving from homelessness into new housing provided either by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) or non-profit providers. Project Home staff worked in collaboration with these housing developers, efficiently providing diverse social service expertise

and enabling developers to do what they do best, i.e. build new or renovate old units for use by lower income individuals and families. Utilizing Project Home as the common service provider enabled developers to avoid creating redundant and inefficient service operations with each new building. Our staff helped fill and stabilize NYCHA developments — including one right here on Eldridge Street that the Settlement had been working on for almost twenty years — as well as more than a dozen projects across the community. In addition, Project Home continued the Settlement's historic tradition of advocacy and empowerment, bringing the community together to fight for the rights of immigrants and low-income tenants, and providing them with the tools they needed to continue advocating for themselves.

Project Home is still flourishing, now focusing on issues such as preventing tenant evictions (caused, in part, by gentrification or intense land speculation), protecting immigrants' rights, mitigating the effects of domestic violence, securing access for individuals and families to public benefits, providing assistance in finding employment opportunities, and other needs as they arise.

In another example of essential and effective community collaboration, University Settlement joined with the Roosevelt Park Coalition to remove the criminal elements which had taken control of the Park, and began working with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation to redesign the use of the largest public open space in the neighborhood. Our staff joined our neighbors in patrolling the park, finding services for those

who needed help, and working with the police to uncover and challenge crime. In some cases, our staff were threatened or even harmed, but ultimately we were successful. Our pre-school continued to use the park throughout this difficult period, an important demonstration of our commitment. This important work reinforced the Settlement's historic connection to the City's open space movement and the work of Charles Stover, an early Settlement leader, at the turn of the 20th century. Roosevelt Park has since been beautifully redesigned from end to end, and has become a dynamic and vital focal point for the incredibly diverse populations living around it.

Rebuilding University Settlement's historic home at 184 Eldridge Street became another important priority. Placed on the National Register in 1986, but in need of substantial work if it was to continue serving the community, this incredible building deserved our loyalty and attention. Many people recommended selling the property and moving to a smaller more modern site — but the decision was made to do what was necessary to preserve a building that has symbolized the heart and soul of the settlement movement in America. Comprehensive renovation and restoration plans were conducted and the initial money secured for the most critical infrastructure projects, especially the heating and electrical systems and substantial facade restorations. Forbidding drop gates — reminiscent of more dangerous times — were removed, and the historic entrance restored to its original, inviting state. If the neighborhood was to reclaim

its sense of opportunity, the Settlement had to lead the way and be a symbol for revitalization.

Most importantly during this period, University Settlement had to prove it was still a leader in designing and implementing new programs of vital need to the community, tackling risks where necessary and always building upon the inherent strengths of our neighbors. For too many years, growth in our program capacity had been limited. If there ever was a time to assert the value of a settlement house embedded in the community, it was in those years. This period was soon to witness the introduction of several programs which grew to be major components of our model.

The Settlement's historic commitment to the performing and visual arts was re-energized with the creation of **Arts at University Settlement** in 1991. Utilizing the expertise of professional artists combined with the talents and interests of our own staff, the program emphasized two



Speyer Hall, University Settlement's performance space located in its headquarters at 184 Eldridge.

separate but related components. First, rehearsals and performances by professional companies returned to our restored Speyer Auditorium after a long hiatus. The performance space was equipped with a professional, sprung wood floor, theatrical lighting, new windows and drapes, all necessary for hosting a wide range of dance and theater groups who became a regular part of our weekend schedule. Second, and true to our mission, artists were brought into our programs, enriching the activities available to our after-school, preschool, and senior programs. The Settlement had become once again a desired performance venue at the same time that our programs benefitted from the City's artistic community.

After a century of providing services from the Lower East Side exclusively, the Settlement branched out to its first new neighborhood when we were selected to operate a **Children's Intensive Case Management** program in the Lower East Side and Central Harlem. Since 1949 we had operated the **Victory Guild Consultation Center**, one of the first publicly accessible mental health clinics in the country. Now we were expanding and re-envisioning our mental health capacity to work with children and families in their homes, both locally and at a satellite site. The Children's Intensive Case Management model has a long social work tradition: providing children with mental illness and their families with the immediate and intensive support they need to remain stable and avoid placement in more restrictive settings.

For many decades, our **Home Management Program** symbolized the best of settlement work: teaching



immigrants to adjust to life in a new country, to manage their daily household and civic responsibilities, to find employment, and to develop workable English skills. Out of that program the **Family Literacy Program** (now the Adult Literacy Program) was born in 1991. Still building on the creative strengths of our program participants, the program became far more rigorous in teaching language skills to new immigrants, a population dominated by Spanish speakers in the 1990s, to be followed by a predominantly Chinese speaking population (several dialects) after 2000. The goals, however, remained constant throughout: enable newly arrived immigrants to join the economic mainstream of this country and be able to successfully navigate all the channels to leading stable lives in the community.

Given the Settlement's commitment to advocating for more effective public policies and priorities, the most significant initiative of this period was the design and initial implementation of our comprehensive and fully integrated **Early Childhood Center**. The first carefully planned steps involved fully blending the federally-funded Head Start program with the City-funded Day Care program, which up to that point had distinct categorical funding streams and ran on very different designs despite the fact that the children and families had similar characteristics and needs. The historic separation of these programs could no longer be justified, but innumerable bureaucratic obstacles had to be overcome in order to produce an efficient and quality program available to all families. For every aspect of

the new unified program, the highest quality standard was utilized coming from either the Day Care or Head Start models. We were not inventing a new service area with this initiative, but the Settlement was proving that government supported programs could be much more effectively designed. With the Center relating directly to our **Family Day Care** program providing day care in licensed homes for children ages 2 months to 12 years, the continuum we sought came closer to completion. Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of providing the best possible programs to the community when the Settlement, its public and private partners, and the participating families worked together.

### **Leadership Through Innovation**

#### **1997-2011, University Settlement and the Settlement Model Triumphant**

Perceptions of the Lower East Side, East Village, and Chinatown communities have changed substantially over the last decade, prompting the critical question of what the future of University Settlement will be as the social and economic context shifts. On the surface, profound change is evident, but the reality is more complex. Gentrification has brought dramatic increases in housing prices both for rentals and ownership options. There has been a significant influx of upscale retail and commercial uses, an infusion of tourists and visitors, an

extraordinary expansion in the number of late night clubs and bars, a profusion of galleries, and many of the other signs of a newly discovered place to be. On many blocks, the old Lower East Side is difficult to recognize. However, the most recent census data also tells us that almost 50% of community residents are lower income, living at or near poverty level. Public health data indicate severe problems with environmental ailments such as asthma and illnesses associated with lower income status such as diabetes. There is a large percentage of public housing and supportive housing throughout the community occupied by lower income families, and a large number of the older tenement buildings which have not been much improved over the decades and would still be difficult to convert for more wealthy tenants. Illegal eviction of low income tenants is a ubiquitous occurrence, and cooperatives built for working families have been converted into market-rate developments. Most importantly as it relates to the history of the community, the large majority of residents are still first or second generation immigrants, though the countries of origin have changed. The growing divide between rich and poor which has increasingly described our nation is evident right here in our own backyard. In short, the Lower East Side is still a community that needs our programs, services and advocacy.

However, it must be noted that the Settlement's mission has, in subtle but important ways, changed with the advent of gentrification. Families who are enabled to rise up the economic ladder do not have to leave

the neighborhood to find better housing as they once had to. Families with children can find quality educational options in this community rather than moving elsewhere. Crime has decreased significantly, with the parks and public places safe and inviting to use. Many of the battles fought by University Settlement and other long-time residents over the decades to improve the lives of our neighbors have been successful. So as the community has changed, so has University Settlement.

In part that change has meant expansion into other neighborhoods with similar needs, but a dearth of resources. The past decade has seen University Settlement open new sites in low-income, working neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Upper Manhattan, while at the same time strengthening and increasing the sophistication of existing services in the Lower East Side and Chinatown. More than just a geographical expansion, the Settlement has also been able to expand services through key partnerships with existing organizations that benefited from our expertise while keeping our menu of services fresh, innovative, and relevant to our changing population.

### **Smart Ideas in Child Care and Youth Programming**

Program integration was only the first step in the Settlement's strategy to develop the most comprehensive plan for providing early childhood services. The next

phase, which began in the mid 1990s and continues today, is the planned addition of new program components which either expand the range and number of children served or provide additional services to children and families in the program. **Early Head Start**, a Federal initiative, was added to our program roster in 1996 as the Settlement became one of the first sites selected in the country. Early Head Start serves children ages pre-natal to three and their families, which, combined with the Early Childhood Center and Family Day Care programs, ensures continuity of care until children enter kindergarten. The unique features of Early Head Start include extensive engagement with families and the gradual transition of the children from home-based care to center-based care. This program has significantly expanded



In 1996 University Settlement became one of the nation's first centers for Early Head Start.

over the years with additional public and private support. In 2001, the Settlement was approved as an **Early Intervention** provider, serving children with special physical and developmental needs under the age of 3. By blending early intervention services with Early Head Start, the agency ensured that families of young children with special needs would have full access to a rich array of therapeutic interventions. University Settlement remains the only settlement house in New York with an early intervention program. The **Butterflies** program, initiated in 2005, is a uniquely creative program which provides supportive mental health services for children under age 5. This program works closely with parents, children, and teachers in developing age-appropriate therapies for enabling families to learn the tools needed for effective communication and development. The **Healthy Families** program, serving the Lower East Side and East Harlem communities, was added in 2007, and focuses on serving women during pregnancy and in the first three months of the baby's life, and providing continuing support until their child enters school. These programs have different names and different sources of public and private support, but collectively they represent the amazing success University Settlement has had in creating a high quality, seamless network of programs for families with young children.

While University Settlement enjoyed the benefits of strong management and strategic growth, other non-profits were struggling. **The Door - A Center of Alternatives**, had been a critical resource for New York City

adolescents since 1972, offering a comprehensive range of health services, academic assistance, job training and placement, counseling and crisis services, legal services, and cultural arts and recreation opportunities, all under one roof. The organization has a national and international reputation and has always been well-utilized by many of the City's most at-risk teenagers and young adults, but had been driven into fiscal crisis by faulty



In 2000, youth development agency, The Door, became an official affiliate of University Settlement.

management and the resultant loss of key supporters. In 1999, at The Door's invitation and with the consent of the Settlement's Board of Directors, the agencies signed a management agreement which enabled the Settlement to assume responsibility for overseeing The Door's operations while instituting required operational changes. In 2000, the relationship became formalized and The Door became University Settlement's corporate affiliate. Virtually unheard of at the time, the innovative organizational structure uniting University Settlement with The Door is now recognized as a powerful strategy to add value to non-profit operations. But it took the vision of University Settlement's leadership to realize the potential for mutual benefit. The marriage rounded out the program range of both organizations – the Settlement greatly expanded its work in the youth development field, and The Door had access to a wider range of program opportunities for its participants. Equally significant, the affiliation resulted in critically important monetary value for both organizations in the form of substantial operational efficiencies in fiscal management, fundraising, human resources, and technology infrastructure that would ensure survival and growth. University Settlement's affiliation with The Door illustrated that a commitment to developing new responses to emerging challenges in a dramatically changing environment can be focused on institutional as well as programmatic issues.

At the same time that we were building our relationship with The Door, the Settlement's entire youth division was undergoing a major transformation. The turn of the

21st century saw a growing recognition among educators and youth development experts that the traditional school day was simply not long enough to enable students to achieve success in school, graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education and/or careers. University Settlement responded by dramatically expanding its after-school and summer services for children from elementary school through high school. Starting in 2001, when we had one longstanding after-school program in our Eldridge Street home, we took advantage of developing public and private funding streams to open nine new youth sites in ten years — seven of them in public school buildings on the Lower East Side and in Brooklyn, two in new University Settlement community centers. These include five City-financed Out of School Time (OST) programs for elementary school children and a comprehensive Beacon program serving youth of all ages. In addition, we moved the Settlement's college access program, **Talent Search**, to The Door where it has thrived, seeing 98% of college-ready participants attend college each year, many of them the first in their family to do so.

These programs provide academic support and enrichment, sports, arts, social-emotional development and family support. Most operate not only during the after-school hours, but throughout school holidays and the summer to offset vacation learning loss and provide parents and children with safe, productive and focused activities that consistently complement the school day. University Settlement remains in the vanguard of the

youth services field still today. One example is our program at P.S. 636 in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, which is one of five national demonstration projects for a new Expanded Learning Time model. This model, initiated by The After-School Corporation (TASC), supports a close working partnership between schools and community-based organizations like ours to expand learning time across the school day by 35%. P.S. 636 has received visitors from all over the country, including a Congressional delegation, who want to see what the future of out-of-school youth programming looks like.

### A Leader in Community Building

Another major area of expansion was the culmination of 50 years of community advocacy in which University Settlement played a leadership role. The blocks around Houston Street and the Bowery had been a focus of neighborhood discontent and community organizing since the 1960s, when the area was cleared of buildings as part of a large-scale urban renewal project intended to result in the comprehensive redevelopment of the Cooper Square area. For decades, the area remained vacant as the community worked to come up with a development plan that would reflect the needs of residents and prevent further displacement. Exerting a strong community voice and serving as a trusted City partner, University Settlement's advocacy alongside



residents and community organizers helped ensure that affordable housing and community space would be built on the site when an acceptable plan emerged. This plan was finalized and approved by the City in 2000, including a commitment by AvalonBay Communities, the selected developer, to build a new community center in the first phase of the project.

In 2006, the long-awaited **Houston Street Center** (HSC) opened its doors to the community. In a unique partnership, University Settlement and the Chinatown YMCA were tasked with jointly owning and operating the 42,000 square foot Center, bringing a wealth of resources to the community – from a competition-sized pool and state-of-the-art recreation facilities to affordable space rental for community groups and local startups. University Settlement's role is to ensure that the facility – dedicated in perpetuity for use by the community – is fully acces-



The 42,000-square-foot Houston Street Center opened in 2006 and is co-owned and operated by University Settlement and the Chinatown YMCA.

sible to all, including the Lower East Side's low-income residents. Towards this end, the Settlement has created the new **Senior HeART** health and wellness program for adults over the age of 60, and the **STRIDE** after-school and summer program for elementary, middle and high school youth to take full advantage of the resources available at the HSC. And children in our pre-school and after-school programs now have the advantage of an indoor swimming pool to receive instruction and have fun.

The HSC's space rental program is an example of social enterprise at its finest. From the beginning, the plan was that University Settlement would provide affordable space rental to other non-profits and small local businesses, using the earned revenue to support Settlement-run programs for the community. Since opening, the HSC has hosted more than 300 non-profit organizations who have rented spaces at minimal cost to ultimately provide services to tens of thousands of community residents. In addition, the income generated by the rental program has enabled the HSC to serve thousands of children, teens, seniors and families. The HSC has been an amazing addition to the community, and a well-deserved and earned outcome of many years of local advocacy.

Our community development initiatives were not limited to seeing the Houston Street Center come to life. **The Performance Project @ University Settlement** built upon the rich arts tradition established in earlier decades re-connecting the Settlement to the City's vibrant world of artists and art patrons, bringing into our

historic building many of the new residents in this area who were unfamiliar with our programs to experience dynamic and exciting cultural arts events. The beautifully restored Speyer Auditorium has become a venue of choice for many dance and theater groups in need of rehearsal and performance space. The Project presents a public performance series showcasing emerging and established artists excited by the opportunity to share their work with diverse audiences. Many of these artists also work with our youth and adult programs – not only with participants but with staff as well reaffirming the Settlement tradition that arts are both enriching and essential to the human spirit, helping to build a stronger community.

With the **Community Partnership Initiative**, the Settlement plays a role for which it is ideally suited and which presents unique challenges. The City contracted with us to coordinate the efforts and relationships among the many Lower East Side and Chinatown community organizations involved in child welfare issues. The Initiative stems from the understanding that public and non-profit agencies should but don't always work well together. If children are to receive the best possible care, we are obligated to coordinate our work, which again is consistent with the Settlement's strength-based approach to community civic engagement.

Following the path of so many New York immigrants, University Settlement crossed the East River into Brooklyn for the first time in 2006 at the invitation of a school principal who knew of our organization's stellar reputation for after-school programming. This expansion into Brooklyn

was the beginning of what became a significant and ongoing strategy for providing services to communities which did not have a significant indigenous non-profit resource infrastructure. The board and staff carefully considered how this strategy tied into the Settlement's mission, reaffirming that our primary obligation was to utilize our programmatic and organizational expertise to work in communities that needed the Settlement model. The Settlement launched four after-school programs over a two year period, in Kensington, East Flatbush, Boerum Hill and Bedford Stuyvesant.

The Early Childhood Center became part of this expansion in 2009 when the City asked the Settlement to assume responsibility for a large child care center in East New York which was suffering from many years of poor management and program operations. The **Children's Corner** presented a major challenge to our staff, as University Settlement worked to – and succeeded in – transferring the quality components of our program on the Lower East Side to a program which had been long neglected. A combination of public and private resources enabled us to prove that programs throughout the City could achieve qualitative success if the right factors were brought together.

University Settlement significantly reinforced its emerging strong footing in Brooklyn when it won a contract from the City to operate a Cornerstone program in a brand new community center, **Ingersoll Community Center**, serving residents of nearby NYCHA buildings and the surrounding Fort Greene neighborhood. In entering Fort

Greene – a neighborhood where, not unlike the Lower East Side, a significant number of public housing units now co-exist with a large influx of market rate rentals and condominiums - the Settlement launched a major campaign to earn the trust and partnership of all segments of the community. Staff held numerous community and parent meetings, reached out to local leaders and stakeholders, and hired staff from the neighborhood. While initial funding for this program was limited to serving children and young adults, the Settlement's goal from the outset has been to create a vibrant community center serving residents of all ages.

Our 125th anniversary coincides with the 10th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. The impact this tragic event had on our community, the lives of our participants and staff, and the City cannot be over estimated. We will all remember that morning and the weeks that followed. Many of our staff watched from the roof as the towers burned and then fell. Given our close proximity to the site, many people worried for their families, their friends, their homes. As that day wore on, everyone rose to the occasion, responding to the needs of people in our programs and in our community. In subsequent weeks, this neighborhood was blocked off by the police, off limits to all except emergency workers and residents, the air still filled with noxious elements. The staff came through the barriers and arrived at work on time and ready to serve. They came to provide meals to the elderly and the homebound, to open pre-school classrooms for parents who needed that

service so they could return to work as soon as possible, and to provide many forms of counseling not just in offices but out in the streets to the thousands of people reacting to the shock and stress. There had never been a sadder moment in this community's history, a more inexplicable occurrence – but our fabulous dedicated staff performed their jobs, never hesitating, making us all proud to be part of the Settlement. Ten years later, the impact of 9/11 is still felt, socially and economically, but the recovery has been inseparable from the expanded role University Settlement has played in building a stronger community.

### 125th Anniversary and Beyond

When University Settlement celebrated its 100th anniversary, there was considerable uncertainty as to the future of the organization, the future of the community, and even the future of the settlement house movement. Twenty-five years later, uncertainty has been replaced by energy, excitement, creativity, and success. There are challenges, but these are met by an entrepreneurial spirit and a firm conviction in the value of our work. We decided that this special year had to exemplify the strength of the settlement movement, and the leadership role played by University Settlement in this movement.

The celebratory year began with **“The Settlement Summit: Inclusion, Innovation, Impact,”** held in



October 2010. The Summit was sponsored by University Settlement (celebrating its anniversary), the United Neighborhood Centers of America (celebrating its 100th birthday), United Neighborhood Houses of New York (celebrating its 90th birthday), and the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS). This was the first IFS conference held in the United States since it was here in 1986 to coincide with University Settlement's 100th anniversary. More than 650 people attended the conference, the largest gathering of settlement workers ever assembled! Sharing experiences, stories, expertise, relationships, and future strategies, representatives from six continents and 25 countries gave proof that the model had prevailed across all international boundaries. The most valued part of the conference was the opportunity to tour New York City's many settlements, during



In 2011, University Settlement hosted the Settlement Summit, the largest international gathering of settlement house workers ever assembled.

which participants witnessed the universality of the issues confronting communities and families.

University Settlement had been active in the international movement for many years, and at the close of the conference the IFS Board of Directors voted to move the headquarters of IFS to New York City, to be hosted by and housed at University Settlement. Michael Zisser, chief executive officer of University Settlement, would also serve as president of the IFS.

Throughout the year, numerous anniversary-related events and activities were sponsored by the Settlement to commemorate our history and to think about our future. These included a Community Street Fair bringing together our neighbors, friends, and families; a "banner" project for all programs artistically conveying their role in the organization and the theme of "transformation"; a "cookbook" exhibiting the amazing diversity of community cultural traditions; and smaller celebrations acknowledging the 5th anniversary of the Houston Street Community Center and 40th anniversary of the Older Adults program. Jeff Scheuer, author of *Legacy of Light*, prepared a monograph on Charles Stover, one of the founders of University Settlement. And this addition to *Legacy* brings the story of University Settlement up to the present.

Two of the most important ingredients in the success of University Settlement over the past 125 years have been the extraordinary strength of the staff and the dedicated commitment of the board of directors in every generation of our history. Settlements are built upon

the strengths and resources of people. Our anniversary year has been the most successful ever in respect to strengthening the board and generating the resources needed for our stability and growth. As a private institution, University Settlement must have the capacity to continuously leverage public and private support and to engage in effective policy debates with representatives of the public sector. The board of directors is vital toward these ends. The leadership of Alan Winters, who served as board chair from 2000 to 2011, enabled the Settlement not just to expand in scope, but also to create an important endowment fund essential to our future. His successor, Heather Goldman, is primed to continue the Settlement's steady growth and strength.

The people who work at University Settlement are not just employees. They are members of a family, engaged in a calling that gives them and the organization a purpose and meaning every single day. Incredibly diverse in terms of ethnic and racial background, education and experience, age and personal identity, the staff is what makes our programs so exceptional in quality. An organization does not remain strong for so many years unless people believe it is a great place to work and a place to do great work.

Since 1986, University Settlement has grown by over 1000% in terms of budget, has expanded to include more than 550 staff, and now operates from 21 sites. The revitalization of our historic headquarters on Eldridge Street is now complete, and the building continues to stand as an historic and contemporary reminder of our role as a

beacon in the community. New challenges are met with creative programming, strong advocacy, and important partnerships with the community. For our anniversary, we kept the tag line "America's First Social Settlement" reflecting our special history, but we added a message that will define our future:

**Celebrating 125 Years  
Innovation for a Lifetime**

1986 to Now:

25 Years of Innovation  
and Expansion

## 1986 to Now: Strong Leadership Driving Steady Growth

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Heather S. Goldman, Chair – 2011 – present

Alan P. Winters, Chairman – 2003 – 2011

David J. Mandelbaum, Chairman – 2002 – 2003

Jeffrey A. Silver, President – 2002 – 2003

Ronald Fierman, Chairman – 1997 – 2002

Belle Horwitz, President – 1997 – 2002

Harold O. Levy, Chairman – 1994 – 1997

Ronald Fierman, President – 1994 – 1997

Stuart K. Pertz, Chairman – 1992 – 1994

Harold O. Levy, President – 1992 – 1994

Stuart K. Pertz, Chairman – 1990 – 1992

Janice M. Lee, President – 1990 – 1992

Harvey L. Benenson, Chairman – 1988 – 1990

Janice M. Lee, President – 1988 – 1990

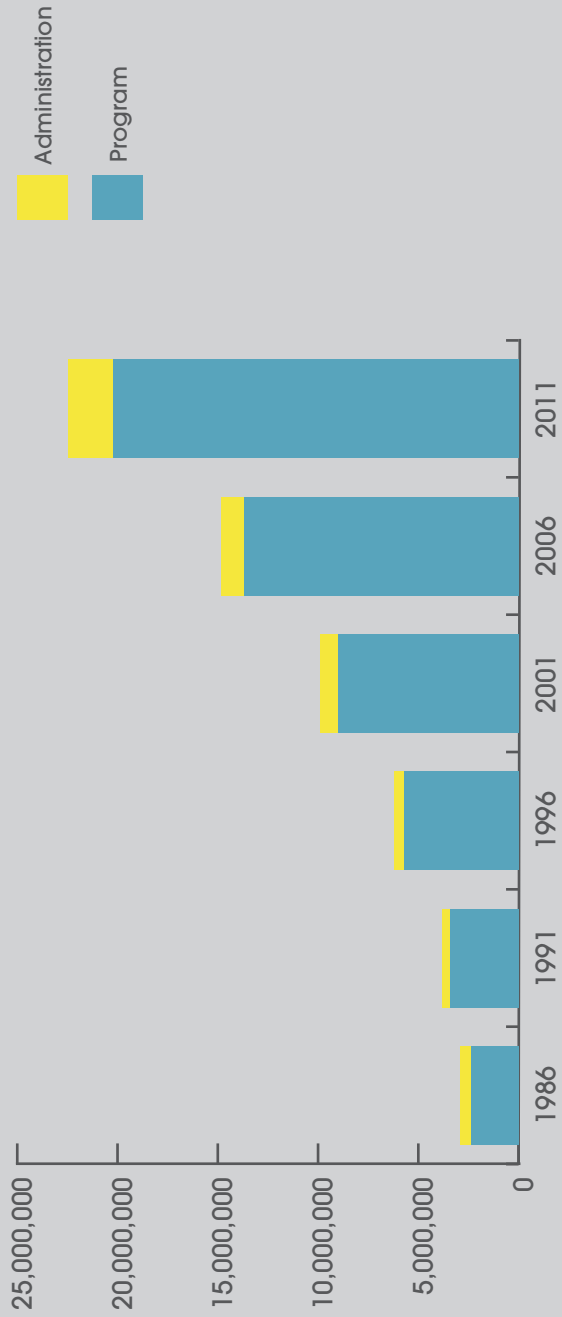
Alan G. Rudolph, Chairman – 1986 – 1988

Michael H. Zisser, President – 1986 – 1988

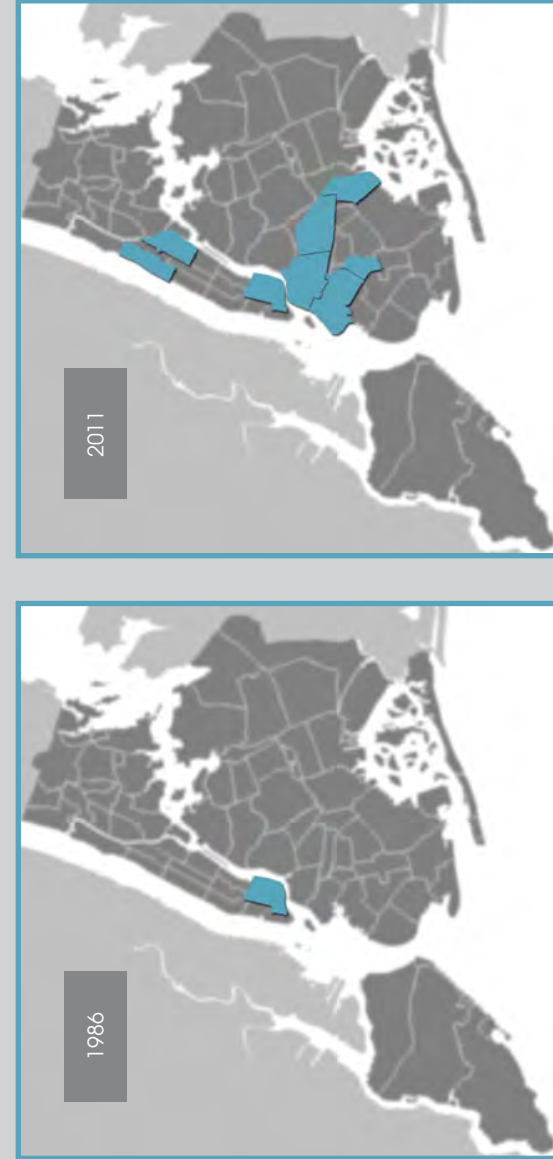
David Mandelbaum, Chairman – 1983 -1986

Ellen Schall, President – 1983 – 1986

**Budget Growth: 1986 - 2011**



**Expansion of University Settlement's Services**



# LEGACY OF LIGHT:

## University Settlement's First Century

Jeffrey Scheuer

*It is the spirit of freely giving of oneself in the service of others that is the foundation upon which settlement houses have been built. Our deep thanks go to Jeffrey Scheuer whose labor of love has recorded the history of University Settlement for us, and to BP North America Inc. for publishing it in 1986.*

This essay is dedicated to all the men and women who have supported University Settlement through its first century, and especially to the gentle genius of Charles B. Stover.

"The Settlement's job is to do those things which nobody else does." - Albert J. Kennedy, University Settlement Annual Report, 1929.



## Introduction

History, the dictionary tells us, is the “record of past events.” But histories are far more than that, as remarkably reflected by these pages you are about to enter.

Histories are wonderful stories, worth retelling for they are filled with unusual characters, unique events, unbelievable twists of fate. The tale of University Settlement tells of the immigrants’ plight upon reaching “our teeming shores” and the dedicated response of pioneering social activists. It is a saga involving a cast of thousands, including reformers James B. Reynolds, Seth Low and Carl Schurz, settlement workers Ernest Poole, George Gershwin, and Eleanor Roosevelt, and famous New Yorkers Abraham Beame, Jacob Javits and Louis Lefkowitz who were served by University Settlement during their formative years.

Histories provide lessons for us to learn. As philosopher George Santayana warned, we may be condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past unwittingly if we do not know it, or understand it. So, too, we can focus on the achievements of the past. In a current era that is marked by an emphasis on economic self-interest, government retreat from social programs, and the impact of technology, it is challenging for us in the social field to carry on. What better time for us to understand the motivations, problems, and successes that were integral parts of the story for those who first blazed the path we now tread.

And, finally, histories can provide inspiration. In 1900, The New York Times labeled University Settlement as “one

of the leading factors working for the betterment of conditions on the Lower East Side.” The Settlement then, and we trust now, was described as analyzing conditions, reawakening ambition, and giving encouragement. The motto became working with people, helping to clear the way to better things. It is inspirational to know that others dedicated their lives to these ideals and to sense some continuity as we, 100 years later, continue the dreams of Stanton Coit, who founded University Settlement in 1886.

Robert F. Kennedy, in the 1960s, borrowed the words of George Bernard Shaw in declaring, “Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not.” In the 1980s and 1990s the demands are even greater and the need for a sense of vision even more dramatic.

Thank you Arnold Toynbee and Charles B. Stover, Jane Addams and Helen Hall for showing us that it can be done. To all those who have shaped this Settlement history and to all who carry the torch forward, these pages are a tribute. To all those who read this history: enjoy the story, consider the lessons and be inspired. Dream on.

Lew Smith  
*Executive Director*  
*University Settlement*  
*October 1985*

## Chapter One: Beginnings

Cast yourself back in time to the New York City of the late 19th century. Imagine you are standing on the Brooklyn Bridge, the latest marvel of American Engineering, looking westward toward Manhattan on a warm summer evening. As the sun goes down and the lights of the city begin to twinkle, you notice a curious void in the skyline: a whole section of the shoreline, beginning just north of the far end of the bridge and extending uptown for about a mile, remains dark. This dark area is the Lower East Side. Although it has no electricity—and no public parks—the neighborhood contains the densest crowding of human habitation anywhere in the world.

Crossing the bridge and walking north on Eldridge or Allen Street, you would be vaulted into a city within a city, where the sounds of Russian, German, and Yiddish are heard; where a pungent smell of vegetables fills the heavy, stale air. The narrow streets are crowded and noisy, with pedestrian traffic, pushcarts, and horse-drawn wagons competing for room on the muddy cobble. Surrounding on all sides are dark, shabby tenements, five and six storey walk-ups, most of them without plumbing.

American history lends a touch of irony to the scene. In the 18th century, much of the land that is now the Lower East Side was part of a farm belonging to the Delancey family. A provision in a family will stated that the entire section from Rivington to Broome Street, and from Forsyth to Essex, should revert in perpetuity to the

City of New York to be used as a park. But because the Delanceys were Tories at the time of the Revolution, their lands were confiscated, and the Lower East Side developed into what we now see in our mind's eye.

Reaching Delancey Street, you would find people sleeping in the grassed enclosures dividing that boulevard: whole families have brought their bedding here to escape the stifling heat and crowding of the tenements. Others are sleeping on fire escapes. In the 20 or so square blocks that make up the heart of the Lower East Side, upwards of 3,000 people live in a single square block. The tenement building normally had four apartments on each floor; a typical apartment would consist of one small room that was well-lighted and ventilated, and several others that were wholly dark, and might house a family of five or more, and perhaps a boarder. The annual income of that family might be \$600 to \$700, if the mother or an older child worked, and a third of that sum might go to pay the rent.

Most of these people were immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe: Romania, Hungary, and the Russian pale. And in some respects, they had never known such freedom. In Russia, for example, the Jews—when not actually massacred in pogroms—were confined to the towns of the western pale; they could not own or deal in real estate, hold public office, or work for the Czarist government, even as common laborers; and they were allowed very limited educational opportunities. Thus persecuted and confined, they had made the synagogue the center of their world. But they did not easily adapt to the



chaotic freedoms of the New World, and disillusionment was common: they found, not milk and honey, but poverty and crime, political corruption and yellow journalism. The work available to them was menial.

Indeed the immigrants not only lived in squalor, but worked in it as well. With the labor movement still in its infancy, and little government regulation, they formed a vast pool of unskilled labor for the garment industry. Working for meager wages, in crowded, uncomfortable, and dangerous sweatshops, they endured the most exploitive conditions in American history after the end of slavery, producing about half of the ready-made clothing sold in the United States.

Few of them spoke any English, and the fact that their children learned the new language more quickly only intensified the generational tensions in the culturally uprooted families. It was hardly an ideal place for a child to grow up: aside from the sweatshops and street peddlers, the most ubiquitous forms of commerce in the district were saloons and houses of prostitution.

Into this world, in the 1880s and '90s, came a group of reformers from the mainstream of middle class Anglo-Saxon America. They were outsiders; but their purpose was not simply to patronize the immigrant poor by dispensing charity, or to proselytize any religious or social doctrine. Rather they aimed to perform a bold new social experiment: to settle in the community, learn its particular problems and needs, and provide a place where people could come for social and recreational activities, advice, assistance, or learning. The oases of hope in

the squalid immigrant neighborhoods were called social settlements.

University Settlement, founded on the Lower East Side in 1886, was the first such settlement to be established in the United States, and the second in the world. Dozens of other settlements would follow in its wake—in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other ports of entry for immigration. By 1910, there would be over 400 settlements in cities across America. Nor was University Settlement alone on the Lower East Side: in a few years, it was joined by Henry Street Settlement, Grand Street Settlement, Christadora House, the Educational Alliance, the Church of All Nations, Stuyvesant Neighborhood House, and others.

Eventually, having played a unique and crucial role in the history of social welfare in America, many of those settlements would disappear into cracks of history. In many cases, they pioneered in areas of social service that were emulated and eventually taken over by government agencies, or by professional social workers, thus rendering themselves defunct. But some of those institutions have survived—adapting to new conditions, responding to new problems, and devising new techniques and goals for helping more recent generations of American immigrants. They have not outlived their usefulness. Among those survivors is University Settlement, which in 1986 celebrates the beginning of its second century of work on the Lower East Side.

## Chapter Two: The Settlement Ideal

The idea of a settlement—as a colony of learning and fellowship in the industrial slums—was first conceived in the 1860s by a group of prominent British reformers that included John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley, and the so-called Christian Socialists. They were idealistic, middle-class intellectuals, appalled at the conditions of the working classes, and infused with the optimism, moral fervor, and anti-materialist impulses of the Romantic Age: people who read the soaring poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson, the conscientious novels of Dickens, the liberal political thought of Utilitarian philosophers Bentham and Mill. They were alarmed by a number of aspects of industrial capitalism: the growing gulf between the classes; the materialist ethos of the Industrial Revolution, and the emphasis on self-interest in classical economics; the terrible poverty of the average factory worker, and the brutal routinization of work, as the factory system replaced the individual craftsperson.

The various reform movements alive in England during the middle and late 19th Century eventually flowed into two distinct channels; in the early phases they differed in function as well as philosophy, although the distinctions blurred in later years. One was the charity movement, which led to the proliferation of organizations aimed at assuaging the effects of poverty on an individual basis. The other was the settlement movement, which attended to the needs of the working poor, and

adopted a more collective and holistic approach, focusing on community values and organizations.

The latter reformers were the more radical, viewing charity as at best a palliative that did not alter the basic conditions and causes of poverty, but merely treated its symptoms. Their motives were a mixture of paternalism (it was believed that the working classes could not endure their miserable conditions forever, and therefore had to be educated in order to preserve the reformers' own middle class) and genuine sympathy for the underclass. They were not socialists in the received sense, and made no direct claims on the state; the emphasis was more on greater cohesion than greater equality. But the stress on fellowship and cooperation, and on eradicating the causes of poverty rather than just the effect, reflected a loosely socialist ethos.

The initial idea was to bring the working classes into contact with other classes, and specifically with university graduates of Oxford and Cambridge—and thus to share “the culture of the university with those who needed it most.”<sup>(1)</sup> An accompanying theme was that of nurturing the whole person; whereas capitalism placed a premium on economic values, the settlement would offer moral, spiritual, and aesthetic values.

While reacting to the more traditional conception of charity, the settlement theorists shared the Victorian faith in the possibility of systematic progress based upon the application of science, and especially of social science. It was felt that knowledge would improve character and cure poverty; that scientific knowledge was the

handmaiden, not just of civilization as a whole, but of human moral evolution. Their aim was a grand union between “science and sympathy” – compassion harnessed to knowledge.

In the United States, even more than in England, the late 19th century was an era of profound economic, cultural and demographic change. Americans from rural areas were flowing into the cities along with a growing stream of immigrants from abroad. And as in England, individual artisans were losing economic ground to the factory system, which reduced the demand for manual labor; the average worker was experiencing a decline in real income, as well as chronic unemployment. Economic pressures on the poor were giving rise to child labor; public welfare was non-existent, and cooperative and mutual aid societies, forerunners of the labor movement, were still in the infancy.

As a result, reform movements were also emerging in the United States at the time, although lacking the philosophical and organizational coherence of their British counterparts. The heterogeneous character of American society, especially as immigrants from Europe began to arrive, made the question of reform a more complicated one. And the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer provided an intellectual argument for the laissez-faire mood of the times, advocating the “survival of the fittest” in society as in nature. But in the Social Gospel movement, which spread through American churches of all denominations during the later 19th century, a reform-minded ethic took hold. Without assuming an explicitly

political form, it imbued a populist hostility to business and laissez-faire capitalism, and a sympathy for regulation, setting the stage for the reforms of the Progressive Era in which the settlement movement would play an important role.

The first attempts to put the settlement idea into practice were made by young Englishmen of privilege and education. In 1867 an Oxford graduate named Edward Denison, the son of a bishop and nephew of a Speaker of the House of Commons, took lodgings in the slum district of Stepney. He came to know his neighbors, offered classes for children, and worked to improve housing and sanitation conditions in the area. Two years later, in poor health, Denison had to abandon the project, and he died in 1870.

The next to try was Arnold Toynbee, an Oxford-educated economist, who in 1875 moved to Whitechapel, a working-class section of East London. There he put himself at the disposal of the Vicar of St. Jude’s Church, Canon Samuel A. Barnett, and opened a center for education and discussion, where he lectured on political economy to the workers of the neighborhood. In a letter from Whitechapel to friends at Oxford, Toynbee wrote:

*Our delicate impalpable sorrows; our keen, aching, darling emotions; how strange, almost unreal they seem by the side of the great mass of filthy misery that clogs the life of great cities.*

Like Denison, Toynbee did not live to see his experiment bear fruit, dying at the age of 32. But their example renewed their attention to the conditions of the poor in the London press; and in July 1884 a group of Toynbee's followers, led by Canon Barnett, established Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, as a colony for university students dedicated to continuing his work. Under the auspices of a joint committee representing Oxford and Cambridge Universities, with Barnett serving as warden, Toynbee Hall became the model for other settlements in England and the United States.

From the outset, there was a remarkable lack of orthodoxy in the settlement movement; the settlement ideas remained a very general one, assuming different forms in response to different conditions, each settlement drawing its specific methods and aims from the needs of its community. Flexibility was the key. The basic idea, however, was constant: a settlement was to be an outpost of culture and learning, as well as a community center; a place where the men, women, and children of slum districts could come for education, recreation, or advice, and a meeting place for local organizations. It was usually run by two or three residents, under the supervision of a head worker. They would live at the settlement and involve themselves as fully as possible in the life of the neighborhood, studying the nature and causes of its problems, and developing rapport with community leaders – teachers and clergy, police, politicians, labor and business groups – in order to facilitate the development of its independent life and culture. The internal

structure of a settlement consisted mainly of the various clubs, civic organizations, and cultural and recreational activities – such as lectures, classes, and child-care – that convened under its roof.

The early literature of the settlement movement is high-minded and uplifting in tone, at times rhetorically idealistic, but not sentimental or condescending toward the working classes. Robert A. Woods, headworker of Andover House in Boston and a leading apostle of the American settlement movement, wrote: "Not contrivances, but persons, must save society... (T) he needs of society are in persons, and there must be overturnings and overturnings, till everywhere the resourceful shall be filling the wants of the needy." (2) As Woods explained, "It is ...the part of the Settlement to recognize and assist every united movement (in the neighborhood) which in any direction seems likely to make broader and truer the common life of the citizens..." (3) The influence of John Dewey's philosophy is evident in Woods's emphasis on the settlement as an instrument of self-realization through interdependence — of making life "more true to itself" — and in the notion of moral regeneration through learning, and the unlimited power of education.

Woods in fact hoped there would be a continuous link between settlements and universities, with the settlements serving as laboratories for the study of social problems. He optimistically foresaw settlements eventually becoming "an organic part of the university, one of its professional schools perhaps." This turned out to be

an extravagant hope: for many years the settlements were, in a formal sense, the work of amateurs; and like traditional charity organizations, they relied heavily on the work of volunteers. But out of that amateur enterprise the profession of social work developed, eventually replacing the settlement as the principal form of direct social service.

Jane Addams, the most prominent of the American settlement theoreticians, and founder of Hull House in Chicago, described the movement as having three primary motivations. (4) The first was "to add the social function to democracy," extending democratic principles beyond the political sphere and into other aspects of society. Addams, who came to understand political corruption while working in Chicago, saw that political democracy had failed to eliminate poverty and class distinctions; workers had no place to congregate, to organize, to enjoy cultural or social activities, or to learn. The settlement was conceived to serve as such a place. The second motivation she saw for the settlement was to answer a natural longing of people for fellowship and "sympathy" – a term that recurs in much of the writing of settlement leaders. Young men and women of education had no outlet for their natural sympathy for the poor; settlements offered it.

The third motivation, Addams writes, is expressly religious, and of a piece with the Social Gospel: to foment a Christian renaissance, based upon "the desire to make social service...express the spirit of Christ" – the spirit that stresses the interdependence of human beings, and the

power of love. However, there is no religious orthodoxy here; the mission of the settlement remains an essentially secular and flexible one – as she puts it:

*to lead whatever of social life its neighborhood can afford, to focus and give form to that life, to bring to bear upon it the results of culture and learning; but it receives in the exchange for the music of isolated voices the volume and strength of the chorus.*

Although naturally allied with working people and the poor, the settlement would also, in Addams's view, be a neutral place, offering itself as a forum for discussion between workers and capitalists, citizens and police, parents and teachers, etc., and as a source of aid to individuals. In "The Objective Value of a Social Settlement," she observes:

*Perhaps the chief value of a settlement to its neighborhood, certainly to the newly arrived foreigner, is... as an information and interpretation bureau... (which) constantly acts between the various institutions of the city and the people for whose benefit these institutions were erected.*

In sum, settlements embodied, at their inception, a constellation of ideas which, though not explicitly political, were as progressive as any in their time: the idea that society is a social organism, which cannot be healthy if part of it is sick; the idea that economic and

environmental conditions, as well as individual character, determine a person's station and welfare; the idea that poverty must be treated systematically – that the causes, not just the symptoms, must be addressed; the idea of self-help, as opposed to paternalistic "elevation by contact;" the idea of the settlement as an extended family, and as a community-binding force.

Thus, the settlement itself had no single, clearly defined purpose, except in very broad terms. It was not a mechanical institution; rather it institutionalized experimentation, and social services based upon empirical research into local conditions. Each settlement was different. The connecting themes were: to foster organizations within the community, as dictated by local needs and interests; to serve as a buffer between the individual and the realities of slum life; and to offer educational, cultural, and social activities for people of every class, age, sex, race, and religion; to facilitate the growth of individuals and of the community through participation in autonomous groups; to offer an atmosphere of fellowship similar to that of the college or university. The idea of the settlement was not to superimpose a new element on its community, but to be a kind of glue: as H. Fleming explains, "...in the community the settlement is the leaven that leavens the lump." ("The Philosophy of Settlements," 1922). Perhaps H.J. Hegner's definition comes closest to capturing this elusive idea:

*Although the settlement was not regarded as a merely temporary device for achieving specific aims,*

*some thinkers considered its function to be partly that of pioneering reforms that would eventually become the province of government. Jane Addams was most explicit in stating that settlements should aim "to minimize their activities as rapidly as other agencies will carry them on... (A) settlement must always hold its activities in the hollow of its hand, ready and glad to throw them away. It must live to die."*

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NOTE 1: Hegner, H.J., "The Scientific Value of the Social Settlements."

NOTE 2: Woods, R., "The University Settlement Idea."

NOTE 3: Woods, *op.cit.*

NOTE 4: Addams, J., "The Subjective Necessity For Social Settlements."

NOTE 5: "The Scientific Value of the Social Settlements," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 3, July 1897.

### Chapter Three: Early Years

"We gladly receive all organizations having reputable aims, and our relationship to them becomes that of advisers and coadjutants in the accomplishment of these aims."  
- James B. Reynolds, 1900

"One of the leading factors working for the betterment of conditions on the Lower East Side ... is the University Settlement."  
- New York Times, Nov. 25, 1900

In 1886 a young American from Ohio named Stanton Coit, a graduate of Amherst College who had been an assistant to Dr. Felix Adler at the Ethical Culture Society, earned a doctoral degree in Berlin. On his way home to the United States, Coit stopped for two months in London to visit Toynbee Hall and study the settlement movement first hand. In August, he arrived in New York, taking rooms in a basement at 146 Forsyth Street on the Lower East Side, and there established a boys' club called the Lily Pleasure Club.

Two months later, in October, the Statue of Liberty was unveiled in New York harbor, symbol of the immigrant experience, with the famous sonnet by Emma Lazarus on its pedestal:

*Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*

*The wretched refuse of your teeming shore –  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

Coit's enterprise, an ember of idealism and hope transplanted from England, marked the beginning of the American settlement movement. It would soon become a lamp in the darkness of the Lower East Side.

Six local boys formed the initial membership of Coit's Lily Pleasure Club. The motto of the club was: "Order is our basis; improvement our aim; friendship our principle." They met twice a week, paying a weekly membership fee of 10 cents. One-quarter of the proceeds went for relief for the sick and the poor on the Lower East Side; contributions were also made toward keeping the



Diverse clubs for young people formed the core of the Settlement's early work in the community.



street clean. Club activities included excursions, recreation, classes in wood carving and clay modeling, and debates on the social questions of the day, such as: "Resolved: that girls under 18 should not be allowed to work in factories."

Three additional clubs were soon established: one for young women, one for girls, and one for young boys. The latter developed into the first kindergarten in the United States, and the prototype for all future public school kindergartens in the nation. In the following year, the residence was organized as the Neighborhood Guild. Inspired by Toynbee Hall, it would become a model for other American settlements: a place where residents, under a head worker, could involve themselves in the community and study its problems; a base for the reform work of the Settlement's leaders and allied civic groups; and a center for social, edu-



University Settlement established one of New York City's first kindergartens.

cational, and recreational organizations belonging to the Guild and other community groups.

Volunteer workers, most of them college students, began to appear, and then a few residents. By 1889 the Guild had nearly 150 members in its various clubs; and after moving to more spacious quarters across the street, at 147 Forsyth, Coit left to travel in Europe, leaving an assistant, Charles B. Stover, in charge of the work. Stover, a Pennsylvania native, was a former divinity student who had suffered a painful crisis of faith and turned his attention to secular works. While studying at Johns Hopkins University, he had written a report on "The Neighborhood Guild of New York." Stover moved into the building at 147 Forsyth Street and lived there for many years, even after the Settlement had moved on to other quarters. In time he became a leader not only of the Settlement, but of the reform movement in New York City.

In 1891, although the Guild had grown to 250 members, financial problems compelled the formation of the University Settlement Society as a subscription organization to fund the activities of the house. At the time, it was hoped that the Society would eventually be able to establish other settlements as well, building toward a vision of having one on each ward. Its stated aim was "to bring men and women of education into closer relations with the laboring classes in this city, for their mutual benefit." The president of the society was Seth Low, president of Columbia University, later elected a reform mayor of New York; vice presidents included Dr.



Coit (who would eventually settle in London as head of the Ethical Church, and became a British subject), and the great German-American reformer Carl Schurz. The Society also included such prominent figures in the world of finance as Andrew Carnegie and Jacob H. Schiff; the publishers Henry Holt and R.R. Bowker; Elihu Root, Secretary of State under Theodore Roosevelt, later a U.S. Senator from New York, and winner of a Nobel Peace Prize; and Gifford Pinchot, later Governor of Pennsylvania.

With the formation of the Society, the headquarters of the Neighborhood Guild officially became the University Settlement. The Constitution of the University Settlement Society declares:

*The work of the Society calls for men who will reside in the Neighborhood House and give to the people of the neighborhood a large part of their time and services; it calls also for men and women who can give it but a small portion of their time, but who are willing to assist by taking charge of the kindergarten class, clubs for boys and girls, meetings and entertainments for men and women, it calls for subscriptions and donations from all who believe that good results can be accomplished by bringing men and women of education into closer relation with the laboring classes.*

After Coit's return from Europe in 1893, the Settlement again moved to a larger space, this time at 26

Delancey Street. By now it already included a permanent kindergarten with over 70 children, a full-time librarian, and a variety of clubs. The Delancey Street building housed a residence and administrative offices for the settlement workers and served as a meeting place for the Society and for the clubs belonging to the Guild.

The building itself had four floors: the first three contained two large assembly rooms, a gymnasium, a library and reading rooms, a room for the cooking school, a pool and billiards room, and various club rooms; the top floor was for the residents, and included a sitting room, dining room and kitchen, and three bedrooms. There were three workers in residence in 1893; in the following year, under head worker James B. Reynolds, the number of residents increased from two to six, with work broadly divided between internal management of the clubs and external cooperation with other community groups. Demand was so great that for the first time the Settlement stayed open through the summer: over 2,000 adults were enrolled in clubs or classes, and some 500 children used the facilities on a regular basis.

In his report for that year, Reynolds, a former divinity student at Yale, decries the overcrowding of the neighborhood, inadequate sanitary facilities, street cleaning, and building inspection.

*Our aim is in every way possible to give people a chance to make their lives more wholesome and*

*their environment more elevating. Because we believe that many of these elevating influences must come from municipal institutions, we have worked to secure the improvement of the public schools, the more efficient service of the Board of Health and Street Cleaning Departments, and an honest and intelligent government which will provide for the people all those legitimate contributions to health and right living such as are supplied by the best government of Europe.*

By now the Neighborhood Guild consisted of some 20 clubs and organizations. These included the kindergarten, with a daily enrollment of 52, suffering a shortage of space and teachers; five different clubs for children of various ages and sexes; an Improvement Society devoted to cooking, calisthenics, and millinery classes for women; a Sunday evening lecture series; a parents' and teachers' conference twice a month to discuss "child life in the Tenth Ward;" a Penny Provident Bank with some 450 depositors, mostly children; a free class in crystals and minerals, and one in American history; the gym, pool room, and library; and a weekly dance series for children, and one for adults. A public appeal for funds by supporters of the Settlement, appearing in the New York Evening Post in 1896, called the dance classes "priceless engines for the improvement of manners and the minor moralities."

In a city that was roughly divided north-south by class, the aim of bringing the classes together meant

attracting affluent New Yorkers from uptown to work at the Settlement. Early reports indicate some difficulty in attracting young people of means to settlement work; but New York society was forthcoming with moral and financial support. When expansion necessitated a final move, in 1896, to a newly erected building on Eldridge Street – the same five-story brick building that houses the Settlement today – Theodore Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy and recently New York's police commissioner, spoke at the dedication. In the following year, when subscriptions were established to retire a \$75,000 debt incurred in acquiring the new building, John D. Rockefeller contributed \$15,000, and other dona-



1907 Basketball Champions at the University Settlement.  
Barney Sedran standing at right.

tions came from such Social Register names as Pinchot, Holt, Warburg, Huntington, and Macy.

A typical day at the Settlement, at the turn of the century, would begin with the kindergarten classes at nine in the morning. A model pawn shop, the Provident Loan Society, would be open all day, as would the Legal Aid Society, with two lawyers giving advice, referrals, and in some cases direct legal assistance. Soon after 3 p.m., as schools in the neighborhood let out, the club rooms at the Settlement and the roof playground would begin to fill up with young people. A hundred or more children would be lined up on Eldridge Street to make deposits in the Penny Provident Bank; others would come to the study room to do their lessons. The library, with 6,500 books, loaned several hundred volumes each afternoon.

By evening, older boys would be playing basketball on the roof, and young men and women in their teens and twenties would gather to socialize, or to attend clubs devoted to drama, literature, debating, and music; a trade union meeting might be in session as well. And men on their way home from work would stop by to make use of the first public baths in New York.

Installed in the basement of the Settlement in 1900, the baths remained a vital service to the neighborhood for many years. Few tenements had plumbing, and during the hot summer months as many as 800 people a day would avail themselves of the nickel apiece to use the facility, making up an important portion of the

Settlement's perennial deficit. The baths were only phased out after the City established public baths on Allen Street, modeled after those at the Settlement.

## Chapter Four: Labors of Love

*"The man who comes to the settlement as a resident comes not only as a worker, but as a student. He comes to study the conditions and people of our quarter; to investigate and analyze the controlling forces of its life..."*

- James B. Reynolds

*"This type of work is more important for our social and civil betterment than any other that is now being undertaken by anyone or any society."*

- Theodore Roosevelt, at the Dedication of the University Settlement buildings, June 1898.

In 1890, Jacob Riis published his famous study of tenement life, *How the Other Half Lives*, which became a source of inspiration for a generation of reformers. And about three years later, University Settlement began to play a major role in virtually every aspect of the growing reform movement in New York City. Under the leadership of James B. Reynolds and Charles B. Stover, working first through the Chadwick Civic Club and later the Tenth Ward Social Reform Club, Settlement workers joined what proved to be a prolonged battle in many fronts. The campaign against the political corruption of the Tammany Hall machine helped elect two reform mayors, William Strong in 1893, and Seth Low in 1901. The Settlement also worked to build safer tenements, and to establish parks; to improve sanitary conditions

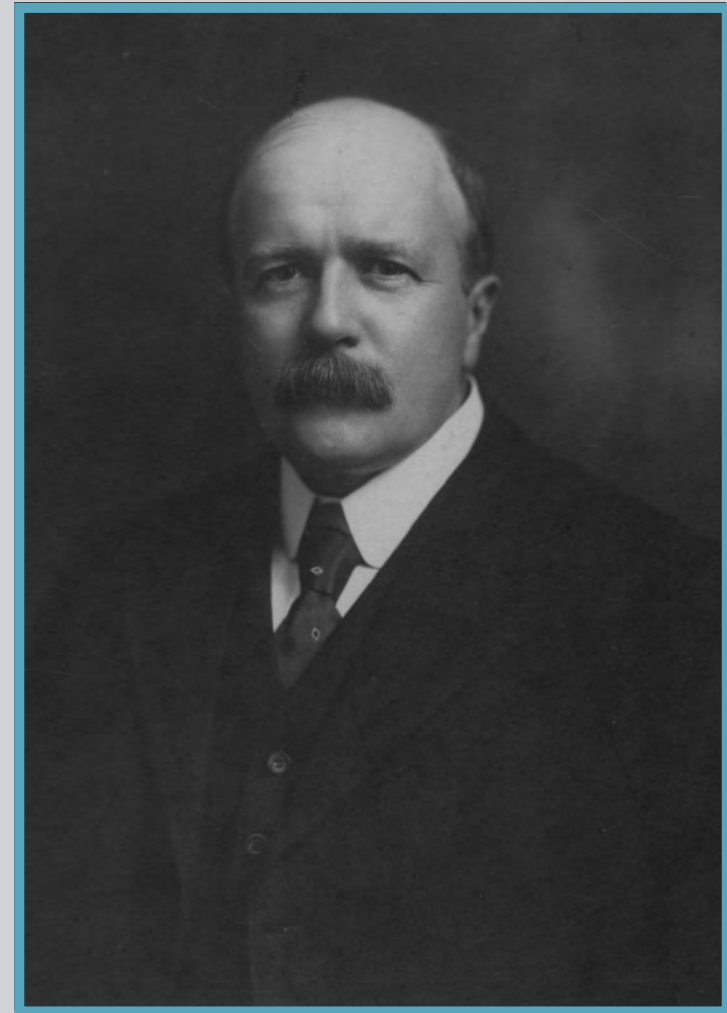
on the Lower East Side; and, in cooperation with labor leaders, to improve working conditions by eliminating sweat shops, home work, and the contract system that exploited so many Lower East Siders. The work of the Social Reform Club's "Anti-Sweating Section" involved, among other things, tracking the movements of each sweatshop, and reporting their locations to authorities, until they were "compelled at last to land in shops of lawful size and conditions." (6)

Relief was also directed at immediate problems, for example, during the cloakmakers' strike of 1895, and again in 1913, when striking women in the garment industry were found to be malnourished; during the depression winter of 1914, some 250 homeless, unemployed men slept on newspapers in the Settlement's assembly halls. But the more systematic campaigns to improve all aspects of life in the Lower East Side were ongoing. Stover, Reynolds, and their colleagues circulated petitions, testified at hearings, wrote letters to the press, and traveled frequently to Albany to lobby for reform bills. And in keeping with the settlement movement's emphasis on "scientific" study of the neighborhood, as a basis for reform, University Settlement residents undertook a series of studies of local problems and the life of the neighborhood, dealing with a wide range of subjects - from the trade union movement to probation work, from the hardship of life in the neighborhood to the vitality of the Yiddish stage. The resulting essays were published in the Society's annual reports, and eventually in a periodical, the University Settlement Society Quarterly.

In 1894 an investigation was made of unemployment in the area; a canvas of 500 families in the neighborhood, conducted jointly with the College Settlement, indicated that 40% of the population was unemployed, 40% only partially employed, and a mere 20% employed regularly. In 1895, the subject was the condition of working women on the Lower East Side; in 1896, medical conditions. The most prevalent disease was diphtheria, but the neighborhood also suffered from scarlet fever, measles, mumps, small pox, influenza, and typhus. During the 1890s, upwards of 1,500 people a year died of these illnesses in the Tenth Ward alone, the area served by the Settlement. In 1898, benefit societies were the subject of research; in 1899, recreational features of the neighborhood. In 1900, residents gathered information for the Tenement House Commission, of which James B. Reynolds was a member. (7)

Concerned above all for the welfare of the neighborhood's children, Settlement reformers campaigned for the New York State law restricting child labor, that finally passed in 1912. The Settlement also provided the first voluntary probation officers in New York State; maintained a paid probation service until that work was assumed by the city; and figured importantly in the campaign leading to the passage of the Juvenile Court Law in 1901. And as part of the effort to improve the moral atmosphere of the neighborhood, the Settlement (according to a contemporary newspaper account) "collected evidence which closed several houses of a notorious type."

Another front in the reform campaign was improvement of the street-cleaning service in the neighborhood. As reported in the *Christian Herald* (May 22, 1905), "The people of Delancey Street have the same rights that the people of Fifth Avenue have to the attentions of the street-cleaning bureau, but they never



Charles B. Stover

received them to the same extent until pressure was applied from the (University) Settlement..." Meanwhile, with the steady immigration into the Lower East Side, the public schools literally overflowed; between 2,000 and 3,000 children in the Tenth Ward were being routinely turned away. The Settlement offered classes for them.

On the cultural front, it was under Stover's direction that the Settlement, cooperating with a labor group called the East Side Arts League, rented a space on Grand Street and sponsored a series of East Side Art Exhibits, which were held annually from 1892 to 1897, with paintings loaned from museums, and led to the Metropolitan Museum's decision to open its doors to the public on Sundays. Attendance in the first year of the exhibition was 35,000, and in the following year 56,000.

A surviving photograph of Charles B. Stover suggests a remarkably kind and thoughtful face; the historical record, and the fond remembrances of colleagues, indicate that he was in many ways the soul of the Settlement during its first forty years. He was a complex man, at times eccentric and even tormented. In 1894, exhausted and ill, and despondent over his failure to win more allies and quicker reforms, he left for Europe, and while abroad contemplated suicide. But he returned from the brink; and one day in 1896 (as he later recalled) while walking along the banks of the Thames in London, he heard "a rush of angel-wings, which stirred the waters, and thrilled me with an impulse to get back to New York and engage in the battle for the right."

Stover was confident of his goals and abilities, but also humble and sensitive to criticism. He moved easily in political circles, but often felt stung and resentful if others in the reform movement did not accept his ideas. He was comfortable in public arenas; but, except among intimate friends, he felt awkward in social settings, especially with women, and never married. More a visionary than an administrator, Stover preferred to get things done himself, and was often consumed by details. But he got things done.

Through his wide contacts with city leaders, the press, and politicians in Albany, and with the frequent support of organized labor, Stover fought the Tammany Hall machine that controlled municipal politics and patronage, and lobbied for a broad range of reforms. He advocated municipal ownership of vital services such as subways – a relatively novel idea at a time when private franchises were the rule – and won a compromise on the subway issue in 1893; lobbied for subways to replace elevated trains, which brought noise and dirt to the neighborhood and blotted out light, and succeeded in keeping the train off Delancey Street; was involved in the efforts to preserve Central Park, and to keep school playgrounds open after hours. No worthy cause, however remote, seemed to escape Stover's attention; he even lobbied Congress for passage of the Seamen's Rights Act, which ensured the proper provisioning of ships for merchant seamen.

But his most important work was in persuading the City to develop more parks and playgrounds, on the Lower East Side and elsewhere. DeWitt Clinton



Park on the West Side, Seward Park on the Lower East Side, St. Gabriel's Park in Kip's Bay, Jacob Riis Park – these are just a few of the parks and playgrounds that were secured and improved mainly through Stover's efforts. As a result, playground and park development came to be recognized as a function of municipal government.

Stover's many achievements were finally granted official recognition in 1910, when Mayor William Gaynor appointed him to the post of Park Commissioner. Many, including Stover himself, felt the appointment was long overdue; but that did not lessen his zeal. During his four-year tenure, while continuing to live at the Settlement, he created a Bureau of Recreation, which inaugurated thirty new playgrounds in its first three years of existence; reclaimed 15 acres of waterfront along Riverside Drive, using stone from the boring of the Catskill Aqueduct through Manhattan; and arranged for the planting of 250 Lombardy poplars on Delancey Street.

By 1911 – its 25th year – University Settlement was a regular meeting place for 142 different clubs, with some 3,000 members. The Society was now headed by Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University; the New York Central Federation of Labor met weekly at the Settlement, and the Social Reform Club had become a regular weekly meeting for most prominent reformers in New York City. The Settlement, had also come to attract a number of residents who achieved distinction in their contributions to the reform movement, many of whom went on to become head

workers at other settlements, or to write about their experiences on the Lower East Side. They included the novelist Ernest Poole; William English Walling, a founder of the NAACP; Arthur Bullard, Walter Weyl, Robert Hunter, Isaac Friedman, J.G. Phelps Stokes, and Howard Brubaker.

These and other residents contributed to the several publications sponsored by the Settlement during the early part of the century. The Guild Journal, a monthly begun in 1907, was published and edited by club members, and contained news of the Settlement and discussions of topics of neighborhood interest. And a series of occasional monographs in urban problems, titled University Settlement Studies, was initiated in 1911, replacing the University Settlement Society Quarterly.

Typical of the University Settlement Studies was a pamphlet reporting on the strike against shirt-waist manufacturers by a local affiliated with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, during the winter of 1909-1910. At issue were the most fundamental aims of the labor movement: recognition of the union and of the principle of collective bargaining, and a closed shop. The strikers held out for several months, and won some important concessions.

The brief report, by head worker Charles S. Bernheimer, offers a factual account of the strike and its background, noting that it resulted in part from the subcontracting of piece-work, which in the aftermath of the strike would be significantly curtailed. As Bernheimer observes, "...the strike is really a revolt against some features of the sweat-

ing system, by which is meant long hours of work for little pay, under bad physical... conditions..."

A similar report a few years later, titled "The Men's Garment Industry in New York and the Strike of 1913," by Herbert Best, focused on the prolonged strike, beginning in early 1913, of some 85-100,000 workers in the garment industry. The 1913 strike lasted nearly nine weeks, and was costly to both sides. Again the main issue was a union shop. Best describes how the strike came about, and provides a detailed overview of the structure of the garment industry, in which workers were at the mercy of contractors – the industry's middlemen – and thus subject to the exploitive pressures of their cutthroat competition.

By this time, the garment industry was the seventh largest in the United States, and the second largest in New York City, which was its capital; well over a quarter of a million New Yorkers worked in the needle trades. And except for the cutters, who were to some extent an elite within the trade, the industry was slow to be organized by the United Garment Workers of America, its labor pool consisting mostly of unskilled immigrants.

The 1913 Strike, which failed to win further gains for the garment workers, resulted from long-simmering discontent; the 38,000 union workers voted to strike by a ratio of nearly fifteen to one. Their principal demands were increased wages and a 48-hour week. After the various unions rejected an initial settlement proposal, employers ceased to recognize them, and the strike was gradually broken as different bargaining units settled

with their respective employers, weakening the position of the holdouts. The garment workers did achieve some modest wage increases, and reductions in working hours (typically from a 56-hour week to 52 or 53). The individual unions came out stronger, but still lacking cohesion; the principal of arbitration was belatedly affirmed.

Amid continuing labor problems, the neighborhood was changing rapidly. What had been a predominantly Irish and German community now consisted mainly of Russians and Polish Jews. And increasingly, they were climbing into the middle class. Although continually operating at a deficit, the Settlement could now at least begin to count on some of its more successful alumni for support. In 1918, the financial situation was so desperate that the governing council was on the verge of turning the whole institution over to one of the large philanthropic organizations, such as the Jewish Federation. However, Charles B. Stover came to the rescue, making a personal appeal to a small group of successful alumni – including Albert A. Volk, Max Graff, Charles J. Cohen, and Jacob A. Voice – who came forth with emergency support.

Since the turn of the century, the University Settlement had operated summer camps for neighborhood boys and girls at Southport, Connecticut and Cedar Grove, New Jersey. And in 1910, the Settlement was given a 225-acre estate known as Tioranda, overlooking the Hudson River in Beacon, N.Y., as a bequest from Eliza Woolsey Howland, the widow of Gen. Joseph Howland. The Settlement was forced to sell off part of the estate three years later to



make ends meet; but the remaining 160 acres were used to establish a summer camp for the children of the Lower East Side, which remains there to this day.

Charles B. Stover spent his later years, until his death in 1926, happily presiding over the camp. Living in a farmhouse that had once been the country home of Henry Ward Beecher, in the rolling hills of the mid-Hudson Valley, he finally found peace. With several hundred children coming up each summer, Stover devoted himself to developing the camp, building dormitories, a kitchen, and outdoor auditorium, staff facilities, and – his pet project – a large garden. Later a tennis court and swimming pool were added. By 1928, more than a thousand children were using the camp each summer, and some 350 young men and women shared the senior quarters that were used by some of the Settlement’s clubs. The camp’s recreation hall was later named for Stover: a fitting memorial to a man who loved children and trees, and who left so distinguished a mark on the Settlement and New York City.

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NOTE 6: University Settlement Society Report, 1894. During the year 1893, for example, 22 sweatshops were affected by the Settlement’s campaign: in 20 cases, sweatshops were forced to move out of residential tenements, and in 2 instances dwellers were removed from factory buildings.

NOTE 7: In 1906, following the publication of Upton Sinclair’s muckraking novel “The Jungle,” Reynolds was appointed by President Theo-

dore Roosevelt to investigate conditions in Chicago’s meat-packing plants. The report, written with Charles Neill, was kept secret for several months, as leverage to win passage of legislation calling for federal inspection of the meat-packing industry.

## Chapter Five: The Middle Years

With the end of the First World War the Progressive Era faded into the more conservative Jazz Age, and the settlement movement went into a gradual decline. As the United States passed laws restricting immigration, the flow of immigrants to American shores slowed to a trickle. At the same time, the children of the Eastern European Jews from the first waves of immigration were leaving the Lower East Side, and the population of the neighborhood was dropping steadily: from 628,000, according to the federal census of 1910, to 297,000 in 1930. By 1920, there were some 60 settlements in New York City, nearly half of them on the Lower East Side; new settlements continued to appear during the 1920s, but at a much slower pace than before. (8) There was a falling off of financial support and volunteers for settlement work, and a new professionalism, emphasizing individual casework by social workers, was replacing the more informal and community-based ethic that had animated the early settlement movement.

Living conditions in communities such as the Lower East Side had improved considerably in the generation since the first settlements were founded; the problems of crowding, and adequate sanitary and recreational facilities, had become less severe. Public parks, public libraries, public schools, and public baths were assuming their place in American cities, where once there had only been settlements. American philanthropy was

becoming more centralized through local Community Chests, which were more conservative and business-oriented than settlements. And a new generation of leaders was emerging in the settlement movement, whose zeal and optimism had been numbed by the worst the world had ever seen.

A handbook for settlement workers titled "The Settlement Primer," written in 1926 by Mary M. Simkhovitch, the head worker at Greenwich House in New York for 25 years, starkly reflects the changing social climate after the First World War. In substance, her conception of the settlement is not radically different from earlier ones: it is still a shelter for the human spirit, a place of fellowship, and an organizational nexus, helping a community to bind itself with its own sinews. But there is now a rigid emphasis on specific procedures and skills; the tome is sternly exhortatory, more like the flinty pragmatism of Benjamin Franklin than the lofty idealism of Arnold Toynbee, Jane Addams, or Stanton Coit. ("Good music," she typically insists, "will triumph over cheap music" in a settlement's entertainment programs; "if jazz is necessary it should be the best. If the latest popular songs must be sung, the vacuous or sordid can be eliminated, and the best ones sung well.") Ideals have become overshadowed by rules; there is an almost puritanical obsession with eliminating all forms of corruption of the mind and human mediocrity. Whereas the first residents saw the role of the settlement as being "to make itself unnecessary" - and in some cases, arguably, they succeeded - now it is a more strictly

educational institution. And, with the rise of professionalism, there is a defense of the idea of case-work, including the recommendation that settlements have on their staff a psychiatric social worker. Compared with the exuberant writings of earlier lights, the stress on order and discipline in this handbook seems to reflect the rear-guard battle of a movement caught in the crucible of change.

University Settlement, however, did not retrench. To the contrary, under the leadership of Nicholas Murray Butler and head workers Jacob Eisinger and Albert J. Kennedy, the Settlement expanded its programs. A full-time staff of nine, in 1923, was supplemented by more than a hundred volunteers. Some 120 clubs continued to meet at the Settlement; 250 children a day attended the sum-



Girls dancing on the roof of 184 Eldridge.

mer playschool; hundreds of people still attended weekly concerts and dances, or congregated in the Settlement's social room, or exercised in the gym. In 1923 alone, more than a thousand medical examinations were administered, and 148,000 people used the baths. During the 1920s, English classes were re-instituted, and a housing complaint bureau established. A health clinic opened at the Settlement in 1922, followed by a dental clinic, a vocational guidance service, and a summer playschool. As Jacob Eisinger's 1926 annual report succinctly remarked: "the needs of youth are permanent and constant."

Forty thousand people still lived in the 3-square block area from which the Settlement drew its membership; and the Settlement's membership increased from 6,000, in the 1920s, to 8,000 by 1936, with daily attendance averaging over 1,100. The membership – slightly more men than women – was still predominantly Jewish, but now included fewer working class people, and more business, clerical workers, professional, tradespeople, and students.

As the Settlement came of age, it was able to draw increasing support from its own ranks, and many of its alumni have left their mark on the life of the city and the nation. Among them are former New York Mayor Abraham Beame, Senator Jacob Javits, and state Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz; the sculptor Jacob Epstein; basketball greats Barney Sedran and Nat Holman. Actors and dramatists such as Elmer Rice, Edward G. Robinson, and Walter Matthau, and composer-lyricist Irving Caesar drew inspiration in their early years from theatrical perfor-

mances at the Settlement. George Gershwin played on the Settlement's piano. Eleanor Roosevelt taught dance. Later, she would recall:

*I remember, before we were married, I was working at University Settlement in New York and Franklin called for me there late one afternoon. I wasn't ready because there was a sick child and I had to see that she was taken home. Franklin said he would go with me.*



Many influential New Yorkers lent their time and support to University Settlement, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who taught dance.

*We took the child to an area not far away and Franklin went with me up the three flights to the tenement rooms in which the family lived. It was not a pleasant place and Franklin looked around in surprise and horror. It was the first time, I think, that he had ever really seen a slum and when he got back to the street he drew a deep breath of fresh air. "My God," he whispered, "I didn't know people lived like that!"*

During his presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt would describe University Settlement as "a landmark in the social history of the nation."

The Great Depression of the 1930s, like that of the early 1890s, presented a unique challenge to an institution designed to deal with poverty and struggle. With soup kitchens and bread lines spreading around the country, the Settlement kept its doors open 24 hours a day, every day of the year; as in previous times of hardship, it offered shelter for the homeless, distributed food to the hungry, and helped find jobs for the unemployed. And despite that hardship, the Settlement continued to expand its programs in new directions. To the medical and dental clinics begun in the 1920s, a birth control clinic was added; art and music departments were established. Clubs continued to attract several thousand people each week; the public baths in the basement still served hundreds of people each day.

In fact, far from becoming superfluous, the Settlement found it could perform vital functions under duress, often in areas that coincided with the federal

government; that minds, as well as bodies, needed to be nourished in hard times. A major emphasis was therefore placed on the arts, through programs such as the Works Projects Administration. As Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard write:

*An important phase of federal action lay in the effect of the arts projects upon impressionable childhood during the years ranging from extreme youth to maturing adolescence, in school and outside. Whatever promise American life held was to flower out of the rising generation but millions of that oncoming population were being cast adrift with nothing substantial to employ their active bodies and restless minds... Countless children were made happy by this arrangement and an extraordinary demonstration of their power to express themselves resulted from the opportunities provided for them. (America in Midpassage, Macmillan, 1939, Vol. II, p. 791)*

Under Albert J. Kennedy's leadership, the Settlement worked in close cooperation with the Works Project Administration, which assigned a number of workers to run programs at the Settlement; by 1936, the staff had swelled to 158, fully a third of whom were professionally trained. It was not the first time the Settlement had played a useful cooperative role in federal programs; during World War I, it had assisted in the government's efforts to reduce infant

mortality by administering mass medical examinations to children.

Kennedy's tenure also saw the initiation of art classes, a music school (which soon had more than 300 pupils), and a children's theater. And, reviving the tradition begun in the 1890s, a Children's Art Center was established – a gallery open daily exhibiting works of art specially arranged for the convenience and enjoyment of children – which received 24,000 visitors in its first year. As a result, the Metropolitan Museum – which in the 1890s had opened its doors on Sundays at the Settlement's prompting – loaned an exhibit of Oriental art to the Settlement in the fall of 1933, which later went to Greenwich House and the Hudson Guild. Shortly after, the Metropolitan loaned an exhibit of Egyptian art and armor to the Settlement.

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NOTE 8: A survey done for the Welfare Council of New York City by Albert J. Kennedy, head worker of University Settlement, studied some 80 centers of settlement work in the city in 1928, of which 55 were in Manhattan, and 31 of these on the Lower East Side; by 1931, the number on the Lower East Side had fallen to 27. (Kennedy, A.J., and Farra, K., *Social Settlements in New York City*. Columbia U. Press, 1935)

## Chapter Six: Coming of Age Again

With the advent of professional social work, settlements remained the “general practitioners” in a field of specialists, addressing the range of social ills associated with urban poverty. And during the 1940s and 50s, under the dynamic leadership of Charles Cook, University Settlement continued to inspire and innovate. Throughout its history, the Settlement has touched the lives of members, associates, and staff; and like Stover and Reynolds, Eisinger and Kennedy, Charles Cook is remembered for both his character and his work.

One who remembers that time is Judge Irving Ben Cooper, now a Senior U.S. District Judge. Cooper arrived in New York from the Midwest in 1925, a penniless young



Children from University Settlement raised funds to purchase “ambucycles” for the settlements located in bombed-out areas of Great Britain during WWII.

lawyer bearing a letter of introduction from a friend in St. Louis to Jacob Eisinger. It led to his first job, and to a close three-way friendship between himself, Eisinger, and Cook. Cooper subsequently served forty years on the Settlement’s Board of Directors, including terms as chairman and president. He recalls the Settlement as one of the most important experiences of his life, likening it to “the relation that exists in a tightly-knit family, saturated with selflessness and affection. I’ve never seen such uninterrupted devotion to helping people.” Judge Cooper observes that his career was deeply influenced by that experience, for example, in his emphasis on mediating legal disputes before they go to jury: “All of that is part of the spirit encouraged at the Settlement – to bring people together.”

Under Cook’s leadership, the Settlement continued to pioneer new services that would eventually become models for others to emulate. In an era when the medical profession was beginning to accept the importance of psychiatry, but the public remained skeptical, the Settlement established the Victory Guild Psychiatric Clinic; later it drew support from government agencies. At a time when services for the elderly were not common, the Settlement, in cooperation with the New York City Department of Parks, initiated one of the country’s first senior citizens’ programs, the Golden Age Center in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park. In the 1950s, as in the 20s, language barriers and housing problems arose in the neighborhood; again the Settlement sponsored English classes, and opened a housing clinic.

In 1957, the Settlement devised an experimental program called CONTACT, offering guidance, job-placement,



and follow-up for high school drop-outs, including teenagers associated with the Settlement and those referred to it by local schools, churches, and other organizations. With one paid worker and two volunteers, CONTACT had difficulty finding local employers willing to provide job opportunities; nevertheless it managed to place 874 young people in jobs over a period of less than two years. And the finding that 20 percent of the youths referred to the program could not read or write well enough to hold down menial jobs prompted the Board of Education to add a reading specialist to a local school.

With the emergence of the Great Society antipov-erty programs in the 1960s, a range of services offered by University Settlement were formalized under government sponsorship, in forms such as Head Start, Action for Progress, and the Phoenix Pre-Addiction Control Project. At the same time, the Settlement continued to innovate, with projects such as University Outpost, providing tutoring and help with college admissions – which later became a model for the government’s SEEK programs – and a film program developed at the Settlement that evolved into the citywide Young Filmmakers Workshop. And at the urging of the Settlement’s workers, the Max Meltzer and Rafael Hernandez Houses were built, the first low-income public housing in the neighborhood in 70 years. In 1971, the Settlement established satellite community centers at those projects.

More recently, the Settlement has renewed its attention to the needs of teenagers, through programs such as DAWN, a discovery and awareness program for ado-

lescent girls, and Talent Search, which works with local secondary schools to identify talented students and help them to stay in school and go on to college. And at a time when many not-for-profit camps are being forced to close their doors, the Settlement’s camp at Beacon continues to give Lower East Side children a chance to enjoy camping, swimming, pioneering, and nature study, while also developing their social skills. A work camp for teenagers teaches such skills as carpentry and painting, food preparation, landscaping, and counseling.

In 1986, the Lower East Side remains a precarious point of entry into American society for immigrant peoples. Where once there were Irish and Germans, then Jews from Eastern Europe, today the neighborhood is predominantly Hispanic. Asians from Chinatown, Italians from Little Italy, have continued to filter into the area. Only a small remnant remains of the formerly dominant Jewish community; most of the more successful Jews moved out of the Lower East Side after World War II, to places such as Westchester County, Long Island, and the outer boroughs of New York City. Several of the once-beautiful synagogues in the district have gone to ruin.

But while life has improved for many descendants of the early Lower East Siders, life has not improved on the Lower East Side; the area is once more depressed. Physical conditions may have been worse for the immigrants of past generations, but the problems of securing a decent life are just as severe for today’s residents; if anything, there is less opportunity for moving up and moving on, and less hope. Tensions between the Hispanic population and



the elderly remaining Jews have occasionally resulted in violence instigated by youth gangs. And the cheap tenements built to house the immigrants of the 19th Century are now 90 and 100 years old.

The lack of adequate low-cost housing in the neighborhood has been a source of political conflict and stalemate. Local groups have forcefully expressed the need for low-income projects, but have found it difficult to secure financing. Developers are interested in more profitable ventures. Economic and set demographic forces are causing gentrification in the East Village as artists and professionals move into the area, and rents increase, forcing out the poor and small or family businesses. The city, which owns many of the abandoned tenements, has been unable thus far to strike a balance.

Meanwhile, many of the empty tenements that once housed immigrant families and sweatshops have become the armed fortresses of the drug trade. Traffic in heroin and cocaine offers employment to local youths, bringing in an estimated \$100 million a year, and a web of violence, addiction, and crime. No sweatshop ever posed a greater threat to the health and welfare of the community.

Having spanned a century, the University Settlement continues to serve this troubled area – a versatile social service agency for nearly 6,000 residents of the Lower East Side. A century ago, it provided the first public baths in the neighborhood, and the first kindergarten. Its leaders were forceful spokesmen for urban reform, and its benefactors prominent New Yorkers willing to invest in their conscience. Today, the people of the Lower

East Side are still struggling for a foothold, and the University Settlement still helps them – to find jobs, housing, day care, and education, and thus to break out of the poverty cycle that has trapped so many of the more recent immigrants. Today, like a century ago, the University Settlement is neither a panacea nor a mere palliative. For those Lower East Siders who feel life's hard edges, it is a buffer; for those who dream of better things, it is a boost. The potential so clearly discerned by Coit, Stover, and others – to give hope and direction to human life in a bleak place – still exists.

The Settlement provides assistance for the elderly, and enlists the elderly to help others; counsels teenagers and offers college and job placement services; provides, in keeping with its traditions, a place for social workers from nearby universities to learn the techniques of social service. And while assisting those in need, and helping others to help themselves, the Settlement continues to be, above all, a harbor for children.

Debates over moral and political responsibility, and the proper role of government, ebb and flow with each generational tide, but human needs remain. And sometimes, in a democratic society, private institutions must lead the way, or take in the slack. The University Settlement began doing that a century ago, campaigning for better working conditions, housing, sanitation, recreation, and education. It has not stopped.

This has sometimes meant opposing the powers of government, and sometimes it has meant assisting them. But the essential mission of empowering people

to help themselves has not changed. The vision of the early settlement pioneers – of swift and “scientific” reform, with settlements everywhere serving as the nuclei of their neighborhoods – was not realized, yet the need for such institutions has never been greater, nor their work more important.



Pete Seeger was a regular visitor to University Settlement’s Camp in Beacon, New York, entertaining campers with group sing-a-longs.

The results are as concrete as a sidewalk. Take a walk down Eldridge Street and enter University Settlement’s doors, and you will see what the “good life” really looks like.

It is a Head Start program of classes and medical care for children, or a League for Child Care day care program that allows a mother to work, or pursue education or job training.

It is a summer camp in Beacon that offers a month in the country for boys and girls who have never been out of the sight of a tenement.

It is the Youth Development Program offering supervised recreation for young people, including clubs, tutoring, music, arts, community service, videotape, dance, and sports groups.

It is adult classes in English, sewing, nutrition, or childcare.

For the emotionally disturbed, it is the Victory Guild Mental Health Clinic, offering individual counseling, therapy, testing, diagnostics, aftercare, and preventive services.

For troubled families, it is the Family Life Management program, treating a variety of personal and practical problems.

For the elderly, it is hot meals, a language club, and organized social events; for the homebound, a telephone out-reach program.

These are the things that make up the good life on the Lower East Side – the things that offer life and hope. These are University Settlement’s stock in trade. For a

hundred years, the Settlement has helped Lower East Siders in their struggle to survive and advance. More than just a bridge over time, it has helped to span the distance between the real and the ideal, making life better and more promising for people who are American by choice.

In 1986 the University Settlement begins its second century of work. Its particular functions and concerns will no doubt continue to change over the next hundred years. But the essential purpose remains Albert J. Kennedy's: to do whatever needs doing. The guiding doctrine is still Stanton Coit's – that "nothing of human concern is alien to its purpose." And the only limit, now as before, is the conscience of New York.

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# CHRONICLE:

The First 125 Years of  
University Settlement

**Chronicle:****The First 125 Years of the University Settlement****1886**

Settlement established by Stanton Coit at 146 Forsyth St.

**1887**

Charles B. Stover joins the Settlement; he is to remain a continuous influence on the Lower East Side for more than forty years.

Pioneer East Side Kindergarten is established.

**1891**

East Side Arts Exhibits are begun.

**1892**

Charles B. Stover leads movement which brings about the opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the public on Sundays.

**1894**

First Settlement Boys' Camp in New York is established.

**1896**

James B. Reynolds, headworker, is appointed Chairman of Mayor's Committee to locate two parks on Lower East Side.

**1897 - 1898**

University Settlement moves to its new building at 184 Eldridge Street, designed by I.N. Phelps Stokes.

**1900**

Public baths established in the basement at 184 Eldridge.

**1902**

James B. Reynolds becomes Secretary to Mayor Seth Low and remains active in the civic reform movement.

**1904**

Harry Baum designs the gymnasium and basketball court, extending the height of 184 Eldridge.

**1906**

The Settlement's library is given to New York City and becomes a branch of the New York Public Library with its own building on Rivington Street, one of the original Carnegie-sponsored branch libraries.

**1910**

Charles B. Stover is appointed Commissioner of Parks by Mayor Gaynor.

225-acre estate at the foot of Mt. Beacon, N.Y. is presented to the University Settlement by the widow of Gen. Joseph Howland for use as a camp.

**1915**

Mayor's Unemployment Relief Station opens at University Settlement.

**1916**

Guild Players establish a Little Theatre at University Settlement under Elmer Rice.

**1918**

Jacob S. Eisinger appointed Headworker.

**1921**

Program protecting tenants against unjust eviction is established.

**1922**

General Health Clinic opened.

**1923**

Vocational guidance service opened.

**1924**

Dental clinic started.

**1928**

Swimming pool at camp is completed.

Albert J. Kennedy becomes Headworker.

**1930**

Children's Art Center is opened.

Stover Memorial Recreation Hall erected at camp.

**1934**

"Friends of University Settlement," alumni organization, is founded.

**1936**

Settlement celebrates 50th Anniversary; Stanton Coit, founder, addresses the gathering by telephone from London.

**1942**

American Women's Voluntary Service establishes Roosevelt Park Unit, focused on home-front war activities, including the development of "THE," a newspaper devoted to maintaining a link with Settlement members in the Armed Forces.

**1944**

Charles Cook appointed Headworker.

Stanton Coit, founder, dies.

**1945**

University Settlement Work Camp is established as the Service Unit of the Settlement Camp at Beacon.

**1949**

Psychiatric Consultation Service founded at the Settlement by the Victory Guild of New York Women. It is later aided by funds donated by N.Y. Community Mental Health Board.

**1950**

Spirits Square Club (representing the liquor industry) becomes affiliated with the University Settlement, and establishes cabins and infirmary at Camp.

WAABI Ranch started by the Women's Association of Allied Beverage Industries.

**1951**

University Settlement Credit Union established.



**1952**

University Settlement Mothers' Health Center established.

**1953**

Housing Clinic opened.

**1954**

Nursery School established.

**1955**

Senior Age Center established in nearby Sara Delano Roosevelt Park in cooperation with NYC Dept. of Parks.

**1959**

Day Care center opened in conjunction with League for Child Care and N.Y. Dept. of Welfare.

**1961**

Victor Remer appointed Executive Director.

**1963**

Psychiatric Consultation Service expanded in cooperation with Mobilization for Youth.

**1965**

Legal Clinic opened.

Dr. Murray E. Ortof appointed Executive Director.

**1966**

Head Start Program initiated, making the Settlement one of the original Head Start sites nationwide.

Office of Economic Opportunity Community Action

anti-poverty program initiated, which would later become Action for Progress.

VISTA assigns workers to University Settlement.

**1967**

Merger of League for Child Care into University Settlement.

Five day a week after-school program for Day Care graduates initiated.

Family Day Care Career Project established, using mothers on welfare as trained child care providers for working families.

**1968**

University Settlement initiates Lower East Side Ambassador Project in conjunction with The Experiment in International Living.

Victory Guild of N.Y. Women merges with University Settlement.

**1969**

University Outpost opens on Allen Street.

University Settlement Bellevue South-27th Street Extension expanded.

W. Averell Harriman named first recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Humanitarian Award.

**1970**

Action for Progress Family Planning Service is housed in the Settlement.

**1971**

Joseph D. Kreisler appointed Executive Director.

Helen Brandt receives Robert F. Kennedy Humanitarian Award.

University Settlement opens satellite Community Center at the Rafael Hernandez Houses (189 Allen), providing services to older adults, in conjunction with the New York City Housing Authority.

**1972**

Community-Staff "Save Our Settlement (SOS)" Drive.

Family Life Management Program initiated.

In conjunction with New York University, an interdisciplinary team composed of graduate students in medicine, law, social work, nursing, and the media is established to develop health services for the elderly.

Ernest Greizman appointed Executive Director.

**1973**

Special grant through the United Neighborhood Houses established Telephone Reassurance Program to the isolated elderly.

**1974**

Talent Search college advisement program initiated.

**1976**

Dawn Teen Program for Girls established.

**1984**

Roosevelt Park Coalition formed.

**1985**

Lew Smith appointed Executive Director.

**1986**

University Settlement celebrates its centennial anniversary and 184 Eldridge is placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**1988**

Launch of Project Home eviction prevention and case management program.

Michael Zisser appointed Executive Director.

**1991**

Family Literacy Program introduced.

Arts at University Settlement launched.

**1993**

Children's Intensive Case Management Program initiated, expanding Settlement services to Central Harlem.

**1994**

Unified Child Care Program combines Head Start and Day Care in a pilot project.

Speyer Auditorium renovated as a full performance space.

**1996**

The Settlement becomes one of the first sites nationwide to launch Early Head Start.

**2000**

After-school program opens at PS. 63 in Manhattan.

The Door officially becomes affiliated with University Settlement.

Beacon Program launches at East Side Community High School.

**2001**

After-school program opens at PS 137 in Manhattan.

Project Home takes leadership role in Rebuild with a Spotlight on the Poor Coalition post-9/11.

University Settlement initiates Early Intervention program, making it the only settlement house in New York with such a program.

**2003**

Avalon Chrystie breaks ground for new residential building, set to include affordable housing and community space alongside market-rate apartments.

**2005**

Butterflies program initiated providing supportive mental health services for children under 5.

**2006**

Houston Street Center opens in Avalon Chrystie building, co-owned and operated by the Settlement and the Chinatown YMCA in a unique partnership.

**2007**

Launch of Healthy Families Program serving East Harlem and the Lower East Side.

The Performance Project arts program initiated.

**2008**

After-school programs introduced at PS 133 and PS 636, a pilot program of The After-School Corporation's Expanded Learning Time model, in Brooklyn.

Family Day Care partnership with NYU initiated.

**2009**

Expansion into Brooklyn continues with after-school programs at PS 130 and PS 219

**2010**

Opening of the University Settlement Cornerstone Community Center – Ingersoll Community Center – in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

The Door, in partnership with Common Ground, opens The Lee, a supportive housing building on the Lower East Side for youth who are homeless or aging out of foster care.

University Settlement hosts international conference, The Settlement Summit: Inclusion, Innovation, Impact.

Michael Zisser becomes President of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers.

**2011**

125th Anniversary of University Settlement.

**2013**

Planned opening date of supportive housing residence on 9th Street.