

News from Henry Street

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Spring 2004

A TIME OF *hope*

Homeless Families Look to the Future

On a bright winter day, Adelle* is packing up her family's belongings at Helen's House, tying up loose ends, saying good bye to staff, and getting ready to move to a permanent home for the first time in eight months. Her daughters



A Helen's House family looks forward to moving into a permanent home.

J. Tagliaterra

Kacela* (4) and Shane* (2) are fussing over matching pink blouses from Old Navy in anticipation of their big day.

"Tomorrow we sign the lease for March 1. It has locked doors, an intercom, parquet floors, and two-way entry to the living room," exclaims Adelle. "My girls are excited to be getting their own room. *I'm glad to have my own room!*" she laughs.

Forty-five-year-old Adelle became homeless after she was laid off from her hourly wage janitorial job and could no longer afford the \$900 rent on her apartment in the Bronx. After trying unsuccessfully to live in cramped conditions with an adult daughter, Adelle contacted the New York City Department of Homeless Services Emergency Assistance Unit, which placed her at Helen's House.

Established in 1991 to provide transitional housing and on-site social services for sixteen mothers and their children, Helen's House is one of four residential shelters operated by the Settlement. Other Henry Street residences include the trailblazing **Urban Family Center** (est. 1972), which was the first apartment-style transitional shelter with on-site counseling in the country; the **Shelter for Battered Women** (est. 1977), also the first of its kind and a leading model for domestic violence services; and the **Third Street Residence** for single adult women. Designed so that homeless families will have safe, supportive

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A TIME OF *change*

New Directions at BGR



Johanna Dehler

BGR children dress in polar bear costumes created with Sidewalk artist-teacher Ralph Lee.

BGR Changes

- Sidewalk
- New Director
- New Beginnings

Change is when something is different, outside or inside.—Corey

Change is when things are opposite from before.—Nadine

These poignant truths are penned by 9- and 10-year-old citizens and woven into a quilt-like banner displayed in the lobby of Henry Street's Boys and Girls Republic (BGR) on 888 East 6th Street at Avenue D. Completed for the after-school program's *Sidewalk Arts* component, the piece employs a semester-long theme of change—in the community, in the family, and for one's self.

Developed by the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) and conducted at BGR for the past three years, *Sidewalk* is a unique enrichment program that approaches youth development through artistic exploration. Because of its overwhelming success at BGR, the program has become fully integrated into the traditional services of the institution, which conducts a day-to-day roster of afternoon (for ages six-12) and evening (for ages 13-18) activities for 370 neighborhood children, including 20 residents from Henry Street's Urban Family Center Shelter. Following the public school calendar, BGR's curriculum includes homework help and tutoring, recreation and athletics, citizenship

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surroundings while they transition to permanent housing, all of Henry Street's residences are consistently filled to capacity, serving approximately 1,700 parents and children a year.

But housing is just the first step. From the day families arrive at a Henry Street shelter, a team of caseworkers, job trainers, and housing specialists are poised to offer time-tested resources and instruction, designed to enact a positive change in their lives. The Shelter and Transitional Services Division operates a network of valuable programs and services for residents within the shelters and the surrounding community, including intensive case management, job training and counseling, referrals to other social and health services, housing assistance, and education.

"Essentially, we are a stepping stone," says Helen's House Director Ilianexcis Lugo. "We work hard on the education and advocacy components, because we have a real opportunity to educate clients about housing issues and motivate them to stand up and speak for themselves," she adds.



photos: Ken Wittenberg

From the day families arrive at a Henry Street shelter, a team of caseworkers, job trainers, and housing specialists are poised to offer time-tested resources and instruction, designed to enact a positive change in their lives.

The Plight of Homelessness in NYC

- This winter, there were 38,600 individuals living in NYC shelters, a 27% increase from 2001
- One-quarter of the homeless population is under 18 years of age
- The percentage of single homeless women is currently at its highest point in recorded history

Henry Street staffers are bracing themselves for the summer, when the numbers of homeless individuals tend to rise even more due to increased apartment evictions in the warmer months. "Something I thought I'd never see again is clients in hotels," notes Lugo, referring to the city's placing of homeless parents and children in costly hotels, or, as in a few instances last summer, jails and other wholly inappropriate spaces.

Twenty years ago, the face of homelessness evoked an image of a transient single man, perhaps a veteran or suffering from a mental illness, living in a skid row hotel. The precipitous rise in homeless children

over the past ten years paints a different picture, that of families living on the edge, one crisis away from losing their homes. "It is a daunting reality to consider with the dearth of suitable and affordable housing units available to poor families," says Geniria Armstrong, Henry Street's Chief Administrator for Shelter and Transitional Services, adding: "Our shelters are constantly filled to capacity."

According to Armstrong, there is no maximum time limit for families in Henry Street's four shelters, but the average length of stay is one year for homeless adults and families and 90 days for residents in the domestic violence shelter. Armstrong points out that despite recent efforts to cut the "red tape" and expedite clients' progress through the emergency system, there has been no concurrent increase of available apartments. In the face of these challenges, Henry Street strives to place families in permanent housing as quickly as possible and succeeds in 95% of cases.

A recent survey by the Coalition for the Homeless reports that the fastest growing group of homeless people in New York City

are newly unemployed, low-wage workers. This is attributed primarily to the downturn in the economy over the past three years, as well as a steady decline in the number of affordable housing units available to poor families, which, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, dropped by almost 20% during the 1990s.

"It all boils down to affordable housing," affirms Lugo. "If you are making \$5.15 an hour in New York City and if you are a young mother just starting out, what kind of rent can you afford to pay?"

New York's Homeless Children

Roughly one quarter of the homeless population in New York City is under 18 years of age. Research suggests that poverty has marked effects on a child's cognitive and physical health. A recent study found that 50% of children living in New York City shelters suffer from asthma and cites the stress of homelessness as an exacerbating

factor. Another study by Ohio State University projected that as many as 57% of homeless children exhibit symptoms of depression or other mental illness.

Youth Program Supervisor for Shelter and Transitional Services Eudora Wallace is part of a team of social workers who work to ease the stress of homelessness on children. “Kids who come into our shelters have lost a lot,” she explains, adding: “They’ve lost friends, belongings, and a feeling of safety. They are stigmatized by their peers if it is known that they are homeless.”

In an effort to normalize these children’s lives and address the spectrum of problems that stem from homelessness, Henry Street has developed a wide range of therapeutic and enrichment activities for children. According to Wallace, most activities focus on fun, healing, and expanded horizons. “We try to expose them to cultural attractions beyond the narrow world of the urban projects—beyond the Lower East Side,” she explains.

For grade school children, the shelters conduct after-school “Art Smart” projects and a monthly Read-to-Me literacy program



J. Tagliaterra

Homeless children and adolescents benefit from Henry Street’s wide range of therapeutic services and enrichment activities.

run by volunteers. For middle-school children and teens, there are Saturday trips to cultural attractions, athletic and recreational activities, cooking and nutrition classes, and more. In addition, holiday and special events are planned on a monthly basis.

According to Wallace, Shelter Services counselors also keep up with what children are studying in school in order to reinforce the learning at home, and group therapy sessions are designed to develop supportive friendships and improve socialization and conflict resolution skills. “Therapy gives them the opportunity to express themselves and also address behavioral problems. It gives them the forum and the vocabulary to say what they want and need to say. A lot of kids don’t know how to say ‘I need help.’ We provide them with a safe space to let it out,” she says.

A Hopeful Anniversary

Glad to be moving on from a tumultuous year, Adelle is thankful for her children’s smooth transition. “At Henry Street my children have never felt homeless. They are able to play and go to school and be in clean, nice surroundings,” she explains. “All this year I’ve said to myself, ‘Oh, I hope we have a place in time for my daughter’s birthday party in April.’ And now thanks to Henry Street we are blessed with one.” ■



Betsy Schol



Sari Weintraub



Betsy Schol

Camp Time!

It’s that time of year again! All over the Lower East Side and beyond, youngsters ages 6 to 13 are getting excited about their upcoming camp experiences. Henry Street operates three, exciting camp experiences:

- **Camp Ralph & Rose Hittman:** A chance of a lifetime for many city kids, this co-educational, sleep-away camp is located in Harriman State Park, New York;
- **Camp Henry:** The city is our oyster with dozens of daily recreational and enrichment activities and extended after care programs for working families; and
- **The Barbara L. Tate Summer Arts Camp:** Five weeks of arts learning at the Abrons Arts Center, with visits from practicing artists, weekly field trips to cultural attractions, and performance opportunities. This summer, the Abrons Arts Center will also offer expanded classes for teens and adults.

Henry Street also offers young adults, ages 13 and up, the opportunity to escape the city heat and gain valuable work experience as counselors in training (CITs) at Camp Ralph and Rose Hittman. Interested teens should contact Danielle Algranati at 212.254.3100, or dalgranati@henrystreetyouth.org.

Camp Registration begins in March 2004. Sliding scale fees are offered for families who qualify. For a more information and full schedule, please visit us online at www.henrystreet.org/camp2004. ■



Johanna Denier

activities, arts education, and individual and group counseling services.

Social Worker Dawn Kosnowski, MSW, who conceived of the change banner with the children during twice-weekly Personal Development sessions, remarks that the *Sidewalk* objective of working on a common theme has been highly effective for BGR kids. “The combination of artistic expression and internal examination works particularly well, because what they learn is further reinforced in their other activities,” she says.

With *Sidewalk*, Henry Street has been privileged to attract the highest caliber artist-teachers. At this winter’s Culminating Event, which was “standing room only” by all accounts, BGR participants displayed and performed artistic work developed during the semester for family and friends. Continuing the theme of “change,” the event featured afternoon students wearing life-size puppets of their own creation and performing a pantomime that demonstrated conflict and harmony among the seasons. Made from papier-mâché, the show-stopping puppets were created with internationally renowned puppeteer Ralph Lee. Children of all ages showed off their magnificent fabric art, including crochet, needlework, and knit objects, which were created under the tutelage of textile and costume designer Therese Christophe. Also on display were stained glass pieces created by children in BGR’s After School Respite Program with artist Jacqueline Rome, who has collaborated intensively with BGR staff to provide a diversity of expressive opportunities for differently-abled youth.

BGR is located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in New York City. Approximately 90% of the young people who attend

the facility are living below the poverty line, the majority of whom reside in surrounding public housing complexes. Census data report that only 4% of adults over 25 living in the neighborhood have achieved a college degree, with 70% indicating that they have difficulty with the English language. Many students who come to BGR do not perform up to grade level on standardized tests. Furthermore, the persistence of drug trafficking, gang violence, and other criminal activities on the Lower East Side continues to threaten children’s safety.

New Leadership

“Regardless of their current home situation, these kids need to know that nothing is impossible. With the right tools, they can transform what may be a tough situation today into good fortune in the future,” says BGR Director Michael Burgos

Speaking of changes, another one for BGR this year has been the addition of Mr. Burgos as Director. Sitting in his office with a bird’s eye view of the facility’s grand entranceway, Burgos relates his first time coming to BGR. “As soon as I saw this building and learned about BGR’s self-government model, I knew that I wanted to be here,” he says. “From my background in Economics and work with youth offenders, I always felt that understanding the power structures that so impact these kids’ lives was also the key to their empowerment and growth.”

If *Sidewalk* arts helps the soul sing, then the BGR citizenship component is the heart of its function. The self-government model at BGR is a tradition that extends back to 1932, when the Boys Brotherhood Republic created it to inspire civic respon-

sibility in neighborhood boys. Since then, self-government has become the cornerstone at BGR. All BGR “citizens” take a six-week class on government. The children then put in office 13 representatives in elections that mirror the actual local government. Throughout the year, the Officers take responsibility for the enforcement of the BGR Constitution, enacting just penalties in a mock court setting, levying taxes (usually \$1 a year), and conducting council meetings.

According to Burgos, this year the staff has made an extra push to involve all children at BGR in the self-government activities and integrate it into all aspects of the after-school program, in order to replicate the mini-society it was intended to foster. As a result, this fall’s elections saw active campaigning by more candidates than in recent years, and for the first time since BGR became co-ed, an equal number of girls and boys entered. Not to be outdone by his competitors, “we even had one candidate hire another child to act as his communications advisor,” laughs Lenor Colón, Educational Assessment and Self-Government Coordinator.

“We try to pique children’s interest in government by presenting them with some of the existing social problems in their community,” explains Burgos, “and allowing them to voice how they would fix them. This sense of participation is often absent in poorer communities.”

New Challenges

According to Burgos, among the challenges for BGR in the next year is to increase parental involvement. “We already have some parents who are getting involved informally, but we feel there is a real opportunity here to harness some of the enthusiasm we saw at this year’s Parent’s Night and Culminating Event.” To this end, BGR hopes to facilitate an organized Parenting Support Group at the facility in the near future.

Another priority says Burgos is increased promotion and outreach throughout the Lower East Side and in other communities, especially for BGR’s summer sleep-away camp, which this year anticipates slots for 200 children. “BGR’s Camp Ralph and Rose Hittman is a wonderful program with a rich tradition on a par with exclusive pri-

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Board of Directors Chairman Robert S. Harrison and President Dale J. Burch at the 2004 Art Show Preview Party.

Changes for the Board of Directors

In November 2003, Henry Street experienced a changing of the guard among its Board of Directors. Longtime officers **Audrey Rosenman** and **Christopher C. Angell**, whose cumulative time on the Board represents an astounding 75 years, stepped down from their respective posts.

A managing partner of the law firm Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler LLP specializing in estate planning and administration and the representation of tax-exempt organizations, Angell provided sage counsel through countless hours of pro bono work to Henry Street during his two terms as President.

As Chairman since 1986, Rosenman shepherded an era of reinvigorated programming and fundraising, during which time the agency's budget bloomed from \$6 million to over \$32 million, its staff and services doubled, and its scope extended to 19 physical locations serving over 100,000 people. She saw the completion of three successful Capital Campaigns and the creation of two annual fundraising events—The Art Show and the Spring Gala, which together raise more than \$1 million annually. A fortuitous course was set in motion when Rosenman's mother, Fannie Askin, who was also a longtime board member, introduced a young Audrey to volunteer work at the Settlement during World War II.

Currently, Rosenman continues her service as an Honorary Chairman of the Board; Angell stays on as a Vice-Chairman.

Henry Street's new Board of Directors Chairman **Robert S. Harrison** first became interested in the Settlement after getting acquainted with the agency's Good Companions Senior Center. The programs struck a cord, he says, because his own grandparents lived on the Lower East Side when the family first emigrated from Russia. After joining the board in 1993, Harrison became a driving force on the agency's Finance Committee, drawing on two decades of Wall Street experience.

Harrison began his career as an attorney at Davis Polk & Wardwell in New York and Paris. From 1987 to 2003, he worked as an investment banker at Goldman, Sachs & Co., where he was a partner and co-head of the Communications, Media, and Entertainment Group worldwide. He received a JD from Yale Law School in 1981 and a BA degree from Cornell University in 1976. As a Rhodes Scholar, he earned a MA degree in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Oxford University in 1978.

Harrison plans to spend the next chapter of his life devoted to public service. In addition to his work for the Settlement, he plans to be active in the 2004 Presidential campaign. Harrison also sits on the Board of Directors of the Association of American Rhodes Scholars and on the Board of Trustees for Cornell University. He lives in New York City with his wife, Jane, and their three daughters, Justine (9), Amanda (7), and Caroline (5).

President **Dale J. Burch** has been a dedicated member of the Board since 1970. For the past 15 years, Burch has served as Steering Committee President for The Art Show. She also chaired the Board's Development Committee for many years. Burch has also taken a special interest in mentoring and cultivating younger members of the Henry Street Board and Committees.

Trained in art history, Burch worked at The National Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She is married to Robert L. Burch III, who is Chief Executive Officer of Johnathan Manufacturing. They have two children, Robert L. Burch IV, who is President of A.W. Jones & Co., and Catherine C. W. Burch, who teaches history at Humanities Preparatory Academy, a public high school in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood.

Like Rosenman, Burch's involvement with Henry Street is a family affair. Her mother, the late Mary Carter Jones, served on the Board for 30 years and encouraged her children to become active at the Settlement. Her brother, photographer and filmmaker Anthony Winslow Jones, is a current Director. ■

A Time of Change

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vate camps," says Youth Services Chief Administrator Nilsa Pietri. "Since Henry Street acquired BGR, we have been continually amazed by the lifelong impact it has had on former counselors and grown-up campers who share their memories with us," she adds.

New Beginnings

Recently, Henry Street was pleased to have the BGR facility put to further good use during school hours. In February, the facility was selected as a New Beginnings site by the New York City Department of Education. The new initiative allows students who have difficulty coping in their classrooms the opportunity to continue their education in a disciplined, community-based setting.

As a partnering New Beginnings Center, BGR is currently serving 60 Washington Irving high school students from 9 am to 3 pm, delivering a combination of credit bearing instruction while drawing on BGR resources and self-government model for additional counseling and experiential learning. The new program may also allow Henry Street to reach out to a population of adolescents whom might not have become involved in the Settlement before, by exposing them to Henry Street's other Youth Development programs. "This is exciting because we are able to bring our youth development model to the kids who may need it most," says Burgos. ■



Galas

This year's **Art Show**, held at the Seventh Regiment Armory on February 18, raised an impressive \$904,000 for Settlement programs. More than 1,700 tickets were sold for the prestigious benefit, which attracts society and art world connoisseurs.

On February 6, 2004, the Friends of Henry Street transformed the Grand Ballroom at The Manhattan Center into a **Mardi Gras Masquerade**. More than 450 guests turned out to enjoy Cajun fare and music, mock gambling, and a midnight parade by the famed Krewe d'Henri, netting over \$32,000 for Henry Street's vital services.



Guests at the Art Show Preview enjoy exhibits, cocktails, and socializing with leading art world figures.



Masks were required at February's Mardi Gras Party



Friends Committee Chair Lydia Fenet (c) with Dan Gilbane (r) and Charles Fenet.

photos: Ken Wittenberg

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