NEWS RELEASE
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University Settlement invites Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn neighbors to celebrate its 140th birthday!

Join us for our free, open-to-the-public, joyous Block Party celebrations in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn this fall!

New York, NY – University Settlement, America's First Settlement House, is celebrating its 140th birthday in 2026 – and Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn neighbors are invited to celebrate at two Block Parties this fall.

Melissa Aase, *Chief Executive Officer, University Settlement* said: "We're celebrating 140 years of impact and all the ways our programs make a difference in New Yorkers' lives every day – and we are thrilled to invite you and your family to join us at our celebrations. Featuring free food, fun activities for all ages, dance parties, art-making, and all sorts of creative performances, these Block Parties will be joyful opportunities to connect with your neighbors, and **we can't wait to see you there**."

Both block parties will gather neighbors, local elected officials, small businesses, and University Settlement participants to celebrate our history, our work, and the city we all call home:

- *Manhattan in the Lower East Side:* ***September 26, 2026*** *– Eldridge Street at Rivington Street*
  - *Featuring a Ping-Pong Tournament and many other fun free activities!*
  - *Taking place in front of University Settlement's historic headquarters, built in 1898*
- *Brooklyn in Boerum Hill:* ***October 3, 2026*** *– PS133, 610 Baltic Street*
  - *Featuring a Kickball Tournament and many other fun free activities!*
  - *Taking place at University Settlement's first program site in Brooklyn, established more than 20 years ago*

Founded by groundbreaking reformers on the Lower East Side in 1886, today University Settlement builds stronger communities and a comprehensive network of innovative, responsive social services in partnership with more than 40,000 of our neighbors in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn every year.

University Settlement's holistic and interconnected programs include early childhood education; youth development including after-school and college access; older adults centers and community building for adults 60+; tenant advocacy; creative arts; English classes for adult immigrants; civic engagement; and groundbreaking community mental health and wellness initiatives whose approaches are embedded throughout the network.

"For 140 years, we've gathered our neighbors around our shared dream of a New York where diverse communities are welcoming, affordable, and equitable," said **Steven Portericker,** *Chief Program and Equity Officer, University Settlement*. "While a lot has changed over the decades, we still share values with the people who founded our movement – namely, that we all have a responsibility to take care of each other; that unjust systems, not people themselves, are at the root of societal problems; and that all of us who wish to build a better world must begin by creating relationships and cultivating solidarity across identities and divisions."

University Settlement's long and innovative history is studded with many boldface names and important firsts:

- When she was a young woman, **Eleanor Roosevelt** was a dance teacher at University Settlement, and she brought future **President Franklin Delano Roosevelt** to visit on one of their first dates, an experience said to have shaped their attitudes toward poverty.

- In the 1910s and 1920s, composers **George** and **Ira Gershwin**, renowned for works including *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Porgy and Bess*, participated in after-school programs at University Settlement.

- Accessibility to the **arts, outdoor and recreation space** are central to our history. We hosted **neighborhood exhibits with The Met in the 1930s** and helped found some of the first public parks (**Seward Park** was our first) and libraries.

- The **professionalization of social work and public health research** is rooted in our history. Early settlement house workers were the first to investigate health outcomes as linked to poverty, nutrition, and community engagement.

- In 1947 we founded what was among the first **community-based mental health clinics** in New York City to care for veterans returning from World War II with shell shock, which we would now recognize as PTSD; today our **Consultation Center**

serves more than 1,200 children and adults annually with a broad continuum of mental health supports including therapy and psychiatric care.

- We also had a long association with folksinger **Pete Seeger**, who sang "This Land is Your Land" and "If I Had a Hammer" among other classics to generations of young people at our summer camp.

- Early childhood education has been central to our work from the moment of our founding, and we have a strong claim to having introduced the idea of **Kindergarten** to the United States as well as hosting the **first rounds of Head Start (1965) and Early Head Start (1994) programs.**

- University Settlement has **received the federal Talent Search grant since its inception in 1965,** and since then our College Passport program has partnered with thousands of low-income and first-generation college students as they succeed in high school and matriculate to higher education.

- In the 1990s **University Settlement was one of the first organizations funded by New York City to establish a Beacon** – which transform school buildings into community centers with programs for people of all ages – at the East Side Community School in the East Village.

- Since the 1990s, **University Settlement's community arts programs have engaged tens of thousands of New Yorkers** with opportunities to create art, explore their feelings, and cope with challenges.

    - *The Performance Project @ University Settlement* engages young local artists and emerging professional artists with opportunities to create and present new work.

    - One of the first arts-in-healthcare organizations, *The Creative Center @ University Settlement* delivers integrates the arts into medical and community spaces for people living with cancer and chronic illness, their caregivers, and healthcare professionals.

- **In 2006 we began a thoughtful, grassroots-engaged expansion of our programs into Brooklyn** with the after-school program at PS 133 in Boerum Hill. Today, University Settlement programs take place at more than a dozen program sites in Brooklyn, including many after-school programs, two Cornerstone community centers embedded into NYCHA facilities at the Ingersoll and Atlantic Terminal Houses, and Children's Corner Early Childhood Center in East New York.

- In 2025 **University Settlement significantly expanded Wellness Together, our program for homebound older adults and caregivers** and began reaching more

than 1,000 adults over 60+ aging in place in Lower Manhattan with stabilizing community care and relationship-building activities including an experimental theater workshop and opportunities for civic engagement.

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About University Settlement

University Settlement partners with 40,000+ New Yorkers in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn every year to build on our collective strengths as we achieve healthy, stable, and remarkable lives.

For 140 years, we've fought poverty and systemic inequality by building highly effective social services in collaboration with our neighbors.

Established in 1886 as the first Settlement House in the United States, we bring the values of our movement into the 21st century by meeting New Yorkers where they live, listening deeply to all perspectives, and creating space for responsive cooperation.

Joining with our neighbors to make stable foundations where people of all ages can grow and pursue their dreams, we build community strength.

We infuse a commitment to civic engagement, equality, and communal action into each of our programs, which include early childhood education, youth development, healthy aging, mental health and wellness, housing advocacy and benefits assistance, English classes for adult immigrants, community centers, and the arts.

#NYCisUS. What can we do together? Learn more at www.universitysettlement.org