



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Thursday, October 8, 2009

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Sara Stuart
ssuart@unionsett.org

(212) 828-6024

www.unionsettlement.org

And Meredith Halpern

meredith.halpern@hunter.cuny.edu

(212) 772-4068

**UNION SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATION AND HUNTER COLLEGE SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL WORK PARTNER TO LAUNCH YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
AND RESEARCH PROGRAM AT THE ISAAC NEWTON MIDDLE
SCHOOL FOR MATH AND SCIENCES IN EAST HARLEM**

Program Will Focus on Reproductive Health Issues and Chronic Disease Prevention

NEW YORK – Union Settlement Association, a 114-year old community-based organization serving the East Harlem neighborhood of New York City, and the Hunter College School of Social Work of the City University of New York today announced that they have received a three-year \$900,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to launch the *Bridges Youth Empowerment Program*. The program, which will operate as a partnership with the Isaac Newton Middle School for Math & Science, will address serious health risks faced by youth in East Harlem using an approach based on comprehensive personal development and education.

Bridges is designed to improve health and educational outcomes by empowering students – many of whom have experienced personal traumas and face severe personal, economic and educational obstacles – to better meet life’s challenges and guide their own futures. The program aims to help students develop self-confidence, new skills and experiences, and a greater awareness of their own potential, while educating them about personal health and safety issues, including unintended pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and STDs, diabetes, obesity and smoking.

“The program is designed to offer a trauma-informed and resilience-oriented form of intervention, based on the particular conditions and poverty of East Harlem – a community where 40% of households live below poverty level and 46% of adults did not graduate from a high school,” said Dr. Robert Abramovitz, M.D., Moses Visiting Professor of Social Work at Hunter and the project’s principal investigator. “In order to achieve the targeted health outcomes, our focus will be on supporting academic success, encouraging higher education as a goal, and fostering an interest in careers related to science, technology, engineering and math.”

“We are tremendously excited by this opportunity to help the youth in our community to overcome the obstacles of their environment, learn skills, make healthy choices and gain experiences that contribute to more positive lifestyles,” said David Nocenti, Executive Director of the Union Settlement Association. “This is an excellent opportunity to improve social services outcomes in a community that has

historically been difficult to impact using traditional social services. We look forward to using Union Settlement's longstanding relationships in the community to leverage this program and affect positive outcomes for the long term."

The year-round *Bridges* program will include three components: (1) a comprehensive after-school program geared towards building academic skills and personal development, including wellness workshops and personal counseling; (2) a summer program focused on science, technology, engineering and math; and (3) a comprehensive plan for family engagement through regular staff-parent contacts and a series of planned activities. The program will work with 40 students from the beginning of eighth grade through the end of tenth grade.

The project will be overseen by faculty from the Hunter College School of Social Work, which is a national leader in social work education, and will be staffed by personnel from Union Settlement Association, which serves over 2000 youth each year through a wide array of educational and recreational youth development services. Programming will predominantly take place at Isaac Newton Middle School, which serves more than 300 sixth to eighth graders, the majority of whom come from poverty-level households.

The project will include a rigorous program evaluation component, with performance tracked over a three-year period in comparison to a similar group of middle school students. The analysis will include evaluation of anticipated long-term outcomes of positive changes in reproductive health and health and wellness practices for the youth, as well as improved academic engagement and performance.

About the Union Settlement Association

Union Settlement Association has been working with and for the residents of East Harlem since 1895. A community mainstay, Union Settlement seeks to foster leadership and self-sufficiency by helping local residents build better lives for themselves and their families. As one of East Harlem's largest social service agencies, Union Settlement responds to issues that affect the entire community, serving more than 13,000 low-income residents annually through effective programs in education, childcare, nutrition, senior services, counseling, the arts, job training, and economic development. Union Settlement is a large local employer with programs operating in 18 different sites, and thereby also serves as an important contributor to the economic vitality of East Harlem.

About the Hunter College School of Social Work of the City of New York

The Hunter College School of Social Work, established in 1958, is the oldest publicly sponsored graduate social work program in the City of New York. The school's focus is on excellence in education for social work practice, and its graduates are known for providing leadership in addressing major social problems in our ever changing society. Through its educational programs and all of its activities, the School of Social Work especially seeks to enhance the well-being of poor, vulnerable and stigmatized populations in our society. The faculty of the School of Social Work is nationally and internationally known for its teaching, scholarship and contributions to the field of study. They are focused on agency-based social work practice, education of their students, and knowledge-building through research.

#####