

Welcome to the Fall 2015 Elmezzi Foundation Newsletter!

This past summer gave us plenty of great weather and programming from our grantees! This is the second 2015 issue of our bi-annual newsletters, and we are pleased to share both our own as well as our grantee summer/fall updates with our community!

Grantee Updates

- On November 10, 2015, Zone 126 will host the first ever NYC GradNation Summit. It will be a day-long forum of speakers & workshops on closing the achievement gap. Register for free at Zone126.org!
- Queens Community House has launched a new Young Adult Food Sector Employment Initiative, Queens Connect. Young adults will be given several weeks of training to prepare them for entering jobs in the food sector.
- All Dreamers from the first graduating group of the "I Have A Dream" Foundation NY Ravenswood II program have started their first college semester!

Elmezzi Gets to Know Successful Programming for the benefit of Western Queens

This past summer, Elmezzi contacted, spoke to and met with over 20 organizations that are either already working in Western Queens or exploring potential partnerships in the area. As part of our focus on Long Island City and Astoria, we make it a priority to keep open lines of communications between ourselves and non-profits addressing issues facing our community.

We also performed an evaluation of our core grants this summer and determined that so far in 2015, our funding has directly impacted 6470 people, 4890 of whom live in Long Island City or Astoria! This was a 40% increase in the total number of people impacted from 2014, which can be attributed to an increase in total grant making last year.

Stay Up to Date with The Elmezzi Foundation

If you enjoy hearing about our updates then follow us on Twitter, like us on Facebook, or read the news blog on our website where we post grantee updates, award recognitions, and points of general interest regularly!

Spotlight on Two Bright Young Women



Chelsy (Left) and Theresa.

An alumna of the Sadie Nash Leadership Project, Yasmin Butt applied the self-advocacy and leadership skills she learned in SNLP to organize a health fair in her home borough of Staten Island. She was able to bring attention to food deserts in Staten Island as well as the communities that live in them. Her work got the attention of Staten Island's Borough Director of Health and Wellness, Dr. Ginny Mantello and her story was featured by NY1. We love seeing participants of our grantee programs using the skills they acquire to make positive impacts in their communities!

Chelsy Spencer has been a mentor to Theresa since 2009 through the Hour Friend Indeed program at Hour Children. Beginning with their first meeting for ice cream, the two have spent thousands of hours together at museums, Broadway shows, concerts, and even assisting Theresa in applying and getting into Cristo Rey High School. In July, Chelsy was named the winner of MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and Cabot Creamery Cooperative's cruise contest! She will be honored with an all expense paid cruise, taking place with over 50 other outstanding volunteers. We're very proud to support an organization that attracts such dedicated and caring volunteers.

StreetSquash Hits Milestones!

In 2015, 100% of StreetSquash high school seniors graduated and matriculated into post-secondary institutions, both two-year and four-year. Seven of their alumni also graduated from college this year, and at the beginning of this school year StreetSquash had over 200 students enrolled, the highest number the program has ever had at the beginning of the year. Excellent job, StreetSquash! We can't wait to learn of their continued success.



Frederick Douglass Academy II Graduation, Wednesday, June 24 StreetSquash staff celebrate with FDA II graduates, Taim, Jovi, Isaiab, Christopher, Kenny, and Nick (Salutatorian)

City Students Cool Off Upstate

Elmezzi staff visited Camp Herrlich at Mt Tremper Outdoor Ministries in July and were able to see all of the fun activities camp counselors had planned for campers this year. With Elmezzi funding, 80 low-income students from NYC had access to a sleep-away camp free of charge this past summer. In addition to the fun daily activities, campers also learned about the importance of eating nutritious food, being responsible, and proper exercise.



The lake campers use for swimming and kayaking.

Queens Kids Show Off Their Moves!

In spring 2015, AileyDance Kids engaged approximately 185 sixth graders at I.S. 126Q, 114 third graders at P.S. 234Q, and 100 fourth graders at P.S. 17Q through 8 week residencies supported by the Elmezzzi Foundation. Participating students attended Percussion Lecture Demonstrations during which they were introduced to basic West African rhythms, Musical Theater, and Jazz/HipHop movement styles. An Ailey School Student Performing Group held a one hour performance for students at each of the schools, and toward the end of their residencies, participating students held a performance of their own, demonstrating the choreography that they learned.



Ailey's AileyDance Kids residency at P.S. 234Q in Astoria, NY. Photo by Naya Samuel.



Members of the ACQC TONYC troupe rehearsing for their show in December.

Theater of the Oppressed NYC Partners with ACQC

With Elmezzzi funding, a new grantee the Theater of the Oppressed NYC was able to partner and collaborate with AIDS Center of Queens County (ACQC) in order to begin a theater troupe of folks already using services at ACQC. TONYC creates theater troupes with community members that are dealing with social and human rights issues, allowing them to connect with their communities and brainstorm solutions to pressing problems. Their partnership with ACQC has already taken off and will be debuting the troupe's finalized piece this coming December!

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Connecticut's Littles make a Big Catch!

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern Connecticut held its inaugural Big Fish Little Fish Fundraiser in early September. Four captains from a local yacht club welcomed matches to venture out on Long Island Sound and experience the fun of fishing. A significant outcome was introducing the sport to kids who live on or near Connecticut's shoreline, but had never had the opportunity to experience it in quite this way. The enthusiasm of the returning "fisher-kids", all of whom had at least one catch, was heartwarming. Each of the Captains is eager to repeat the event next year!



BBBSSWCT students participating in the Big Fish Little Fish Fundraiser.

Elmezzzi Updates

- In September, 20 representatives from Elmezzzi's diverse grantee portfolio convened in our office space in to attend a professional development and networking session around PR and Communications for nonprofit organizations.
- In summer 2015, Elmezzzi funding helped to bring Sadie Nash Leadership Project and Legal Outreach programming to Long Island City for the first time! In total, the two programs served over 40 youth.
- Also in the summer of 2015, our work and grantees were featured in the press by four different news outlets: NY1, Times Ledger, Crain's Business, and the Queens Gazette. Head over to our blog to find each piece and check out which programs were highlighted!

Homelessness in New York City and Our Community

By: Pooja O'Hanlon, Executive Director,
Amanda Porter, Program Associate,
& David Meehan, Admin. Assistant

The issue of homelessness in New York City has recently been receiving attention and rightfully so. Mayor de Blasio has made it a priority of his administration to help combat the rising population of homeless individuals as numbers grow in relation to income inequality. According to the NYC Department of Homeless Services' Daily Shelter Census Report, released on October 28, 2015 the number of people living in New York City shelters sits at just over 57,400, but as the winter approaches, many experts expect that number to quickly match or exceed the 2014 high of 60,000.¹ What's more is that these numbers only reflect folks living in shelters managed by the Department of Homeless Services and does not include numbers for people that live in other types of shelters, such as victims of domestic violence and homeless youth.²

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, the oldest advocacy organization in the country, New York City taxpayers spend millions of dollars each year in costs associated with managing homeless populations.³ It has also been proven in many states that it would cost tax-

payers significantly less to provide permanent housing, job training, and medical care for the homeless than what is currently being spent on shelters, specialized homeless outreach police units, and incarceration.⁴ In a city like New York, where real estate is at a premium, and there is such an outstanding homeless population that many of us have become desensitized to witnessing homelessness,⁵ innovative approaches are especially needed. While some leading advocacy groups are holding public demonstrations, neighborhood beautification projects, and advocating to de-stigmatize and de-criminalize the homeless, more needs to be done thoughtfully.

As income inequality perpetuates the dichotomy of the haves and have-nots, and gentrifying forces continue to push some of the most vulnerable families out of their communities (sometimes into homelessness) it is imperative that remedies focus on addressing the root causes. As it stands, poor families continue to allocate a majority of their income to rent and those that do stay in homeless shelters are staying for longer periods of time.¹

In early October of this year, the city unveiled plans to convert the Verve Hotel in Long Island City into a homeless shelter for women.⁶ That news got us thinking about the kinds of resources the homeless or those at risk of homelessness

in Western Queens do not have, as well as the ways in which Astoria and LIC are rapidly gentrifying. These neighborhoods are home to many middle class families, beautiful parks, and over 100 different ethnic groups.⁷ These neighborhoods are also home to the largest public housing development in the country and are also some of the most physically isolated communities in New York City. As these neighborhoods become increasingly popular and desirable to live in, incoming developments will need to be able to properly assist and protect vulnerable populations that already exist here.

The Elmezzi Foundation has in recent years focused much of its giving in Long Island City and Astoria, a former home of its founders Tom and Jeanne Elmezzi. We do this to ensure that members of this community have the resources necessary to realize the American Dream. Unfortunately, there are still a great number of people here that do not have the proper resources and support to live fulfilling lives. It is our hope that as the city continues its efforts to mitigate homelessness that the methods employed will be strategic, innovative in design and beneficial for this population.

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 2. Stewart, Nikita and J. David Goodman. 2015. "Despite Vow, Mayor de Blasio Struggles to Curb Homelessness." *The New York Times*, October 26. (<http://nyti.ms/1SbQGTw>)
 3. Simone, Jaquelyn. 2015. "Today's Read: NYC Spends Millions Per Year on Subpar Shelters for Homeless Families - Coalition For The Homeless." April 27. (<http://bit.ly/1NDkve2>)
 4. Keyes, Scott. 2014. "Leaving Homeless Person On The Streets: \$31,065. Giving Them Housing: \$10,051." *ThinkProgress*, May 27. (<http://bit.ly/1Nb1YYd>)
 5. Smriti, Sinha. 2014. "Would You Recognize Your Mother If She Were Lying Homeless on a Street Corner?" *Mic*, April 25. (<http://bit.ly/1LZWbjX>)
 6. Fermino, Jennifer. 2015. "Old Queens Hotel Turning into a Homeless Women's Shelter." *NY Daily News*, October 3. (<http://nydn.us/1imEaDR>)
 7. Anon. "About the Neighborhood." *Central Astoria Local Development Coalition*. (<http://bit.ly/1GBDR3G>).