



THE GIVERS

Six organizations that are making a difference in the lives of New Yorkers—one dance step or catering job at a time.

by Deborah L. Martin

A WISE PERSON ONCE SAID, “Charity begins at home,” and we agree. The problems of the world often seem insurmountable, but there are organizations that are doing life-changing work right here in New York City—helping one person, one child, one human being at a time. For this special feature, we focused on just six out of the countless worthy organizations working to better this city, and as a result, the world. The Museum of Jewish Heritage, Henry Street Settlement, Girl Be Heard, National Dance Institute, Oliver Scholars, and Project Renewal all focus on different issues affecting our New York communities. With the help of dedicated staff and volunteers, they use their creative energy to reach our most at-risk, vulnerable residents, and to help them achieve their fullest potential. They teach lessons in acceptance and tolerance, appreciation for the arts, and cooperation, and they fight to make sure every voice is heard. In doing so, they empower our neighbors to take control of their lives and to gain confidence and valuable skills. These are our givers.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE; PAWEŁ SAWICKI @AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU STATE MUSEUM; GIFT OF ALFRED KANTOR, MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE (SKETCH).

NEVER AGAIN

At the Museum of Jewish Heritage, the lessons are hard—and critical

LAST YEAR, A STUDY WAS RELEASED

that found that two-thirds of American millennials surveyed could not identify the significance of Auschwitz, and 22 percent of millennials had either not heard of, or were not sure if they had heard of the Holocaust in general. According to Jack Kliger, the president and CEO of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, that was one of the motivating factors for bringing the museum's current exhibition, *Auschwitz, Not Long Ago, Not Far Away*, to New York. “The mission of the museum is defined in three words: remembrance, education, and resiliency.” Kliger continues, “We created this to talk about the experience of the Jewish people, before the Holocaust, during the Holocaust, and since the Holocaust ended. That remembrance is linked to our mission to educate and learn.”

Since the museum opened, over half a million students have come through its doors. Kliger believes that teaching this shared history is critical to the museum's ultimate mission of never letting what happened before, happen again. “We have a very strong understanding of the impact of hate. We are responsible to teach future generations, to not only not forget but to learn from history.”

The museum's chairman, Bruce Ratner, agrees. “Numerous studies show the extent to which the collective memory of the Holocaust is disappearing. With millions of visitors to Lower Manhattan, and with the Statue of Liberty as our backdrop, the museum stands as a place of memory and a place of learning.”

He continues, “We remind the world with our physical presence, as well as via our educational opportunities, that the Holocaust happened, that millions were murdered due to state-sponsored genocide, and that it happened in the modern world.”

Both Ratner and Kliger agree that although the museum's message is a somber one, it is also one of hope. “My hope is that it motivates all of us to make the connections between the events of the past and the world of the present, and to take a firm stand against hate, bigotry, ethnic violence, religious intolerance, and nationalist brutality of all kinds,” says Ratner. He continues, “Recent incidents in Charlottesville and Pittsburgh have been stark reminders that we face a rising tide of intolerance, and particularly anti-Semitism, in our country. Against that backdrop, the Board of Trustees and I are focused on connecting the lessons of the Holocaust to contemporary issues. The Museum's exhibits and programming emphasize that connection and will do so even more prominently as we work towards a future in which we live out the mandate of ‘never again.’”

The exhibit has global significance, but it is the small details that resonate. Ratner says, “There is a child's shoe with a sock still in it that haunts me. That child—possibly three or four years old—was told to undress to go into the shower, and he or she put the sock into the shoe so it would not get lost. The child never came back. I grieve every time I see it.” For more information, visit mjhny.org



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, LEFT: A train car used to transport Jews to Auschwitz, currently on exhibit in New York; A Star of David necklace; A death gate and selection ramp at Auschwitz; A sketch by Alfred Kantor, who notes that prisoners often committed suicide by touching the camp's electrified fence; A transit visa issued for travel to Japan; A prisoner's shirt.





A HISTORY OF HELP

Henry Street Settlement continues the work of its founder, Lillian Wald

LILLIAN WALD, A DAUGHTER of Jewish immigrants, came to New York in 1889 at the age of 22, to attend the New York Hospital School of Nursing. In 1893, she founded Henry Street Settlement after witnessing the poverty endured by immigrants living on the Lower East Side. Wald provided health care, services, and cultural programs for the area's residents. She campaigned for social reform, public health, and human rights, placed nurses in public schools, founded the National Organization for Public Health Nursing and Columbia University's School of Nursing, and started the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, which had its beginnings at Henry Street.

David Garza, Henry Street's current director, is passionate about staying true to Wald's founding mission. "The arts is one of a constellation of programs at Henry Street. It speaks to the principles that we believe are important to the work: helping the whole person, whole families, whole blocks, and whole neighborhoods." Henry Street started with public health as the first concern, and now provides a spectrum of services from prenatal care for expecting mothers, to care for house-bound seniors, and everything in between. Garza says, "In order to serve a whole community, you need to have a comprehensive range of services. The spirit of social justice and community—the idea of neighbor helping neighbor, and that society is responsible for the most vulnerable—still guides us today."

Matthew Phifer, the deputy program officer of education and



employment, is responsible for programs that serve neighborhood children from pre-school through the college application process and beyond, like the Youth Opportunity Hub, which is funded by the district attorney's office of New York using forfeiture monies. "For this program, six different settlement houses work together to provide options for young people, from employment and internship opportunities, to enrichment. Our primary partners are the Chinese-American Planning Counsel, Hamilton-Madison House, Grand Street Settlement,

University Settlement, and Educational Alliance. So we are all coalescing and working together to help our neighbors."

At the Abrons Art Center, Director of Programming Ali-Rosa-Salas, points out that it is rare to have a contemporary arts center that is part of a service organization like Henry Street. "The arts have been part of the mission of Henry Street since its founding. Lillian Wald believed access to the arts is a key factor to help a society. She believed that connection and a celebration of cultural expression was critical for immigrants to feel like New York City was their city, and to feel a sense of stability and security. That idea shapes our programming and our belief that artistic practice is as important as other forms of social welfare. So that's the framework that Henry Street is founded on and Abrons helps foster through our support of artists and not only through the presentations of new work but also our arts education program." *For more information, visit henrystreet.org*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NORMAN BLAKE (PERFORMERS); MATTHEW AQUINO (HENRY STREET).



TOP: Funmi Lawal, Spencer Sanchez, and fellow cast-members perform in the 2018 holiday show, Unplugged. MIDDLE: Jessica Greer Morris with members Breani (aka Purrsian White), Camryn Bruno, and Chelsea Allison; BOTTOM: The 2018 Girl Be Heard company.

GIRL POWER

Girl Be Heard is empowering young women to stand up and speak out



IN 2008, JESSICA GREER MORRIS was working on a project with the Estrogenius Festival, a small grassroots event focused on telling the stories of women's work. She had been an activist and advocate "from the womb," as she says. At the festival she met and collaborated with Ashley Marinaccio, who was simultaneously working on a project called *Girl Power: Survival of the Fittest*. "It was a bunch of girls and women sitting on the floor, and Ashley started by asking, 'So what do you care about?' and I thought, this is *everything*."

Having had a lifetime of experience in non-profit work, Jessica asked Ashley if she wanted to go that route, and Ashley's response was, "I'm all in." In 2009, they founded Girl Be Heard and since then the organization has blossomed—The Sunday workshop program meets in locations all over the city, and currently there are 10 afterschool workshops in schools in the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Northern Manhattan. "Our mission statement really says it all, for me," says Jessica, "Girl Be Heard develops, amplifies, and celebrates the voices of young women through socially-conscious theater-making." She adds that the program is open to young women or gender-expansive youth from the ages of 12 to 21.

The program begins with auditions that take place in August each year. "It's so important to stress that there is no experience necessary; They don't have to have singing, acting, or writing experience." The main goal is to give girls a safe space to tell their stories. "We believe that every young person has exponential talent that just needs to be developed, and we are happy to be the fertilizer that helps that talent grow. We tell them, 'come as you are, and tell us what you care about.'"

Since the program's inception, approximately 600 girls have participated, and this year over 100 took part in the workshops. In June 2019, the group visited their 10th country when they performed at Women Deliver—the world's largest gender equality conference—in Vancouver, Canada. Members Chelsea Allison, Breani (aka Purrsian White), Camryn Bruno, and Halle Paredes performed original spoken word poems, raps, songs, and choreography, all developed during workshops throughout the year.

Breani (aka Purrsian White), a Brooklyn performance artist says, "I developed a strong love for writing as a teenager to express my jumbled up emotions. However, I was not comfortable letting people hear my writing. After joining Girl Be Heard in 2011 they gave me the platform to perform my songs and break out of my shyness." In 2013, Breani represented an American girl's experience in an Australian documentary called *I Am A Girl*.

Artistic Director Kim Sykes says, "It's important to let girls know that they have a right to be heard. For so long women and girls have been placed in the background, and taught that to be quiet is to be good. We encourage the opposite. Speak up, speak your truth. The first step is being heard."

For more information, visit girlbeheard.org

MAKE 'EM DANCE

Jacques d'Amboise's National Dance Institute is changing the way kids learn—through dance



JACQUES D'AMBOISE RECALLS

the time he was on the subway and sitting across from him was a gentleman who stared at him with a very somber look. “There was a lot of space around him, and suddenly there was a lot of space around me—people were backing away. Then I hear him say, ‘I was a tomato.’” d’Amboise laughs. “He was one of our students and he was in a show that we did called *Best Friends*, in which we told the story of the Marquise de Lafayette, who became friends with George Washington and took him to dine in Paris. They had frog’s legs, pommes frites, green lettuce, gateaux, and tomate à la provençale. He was a tomato.”

A principle danseur with New York City Ballet under George Balanchine, d’Amboise joined the company when he was 15 years old and became one of the United States’ most famous dancers. But his earliest memories are of his French-Canadian mother finding ways to make sure that he and his siblings had lessons in music and dance. He never forgot what the classical arts did for him.

In 1975, he approached Balanchine about holding dance lessons for children in the basement of City Center before the company

arrived, and Balanchine agreed. “I went to Collegiate where my sons were enrolled, and I asked if anyone was interested in having an exercise class based on ballet. It was really just a way to get my sons interested in dance. I got five or six children in that first class.” Balanchine was choreographing *Don Quixote* and he needed mini-knights for a dream sequence in the ballet, so he drafted all of the members of d’Amboise’s first class. The following year, d’Amboise received a \$75,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to create National Dance Institute (NDI).

The organization operated out of offices in SoHo for many years, and had to arrange for donated performance and rehearsal space. Ellen Weinstein, NDI’s artistic director says, “We were nomadic, and we had to beg for space. It was difficult to plan because we never knew where we would be next.” But seven years ago, with seed money from George Soros, they were able to raise enough to purchase their headquarters in Harlem, which includes offices, rehearsal space, and a small performance space.

NDI currently runs after-school programs that impact over 6,500 elementary school students per



ABOVE: Jacques d’Amboise and Mikhail Barishnikov at the Event of the Year, 1979. Last year’s class performs.

year. They estimate that since their inception they have educated over 2 million students, and there are currently 13 NDI-affiliated schools in the United States. Internationally, there are affiliated programs in Shanghai, Mexico, Russia, Bali, and Lebanon, among others.

The program culminates in the Event of the Year, where students who show a passion for dance participate in a final performance. Weinstein says, “Every class chooses a theme and we have a curriculum. They design the costumes, the tee

shirts, the backdrops. This year our theme was Voices of Change, telling the stories of people who have used their voice to affect change, like Malala. Even the most disinterested students get excited about learning. They unite around a shared goal, to create a finished product, and in the process they learn how to care for each other.

“On the days that NDI is in the schools, they have 100% attendance,” says d’Amboise. “No drop outs.” For more information, visit nationaldance.org

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NOAM GALA/GETTY IMAGES (PERFORMANCE); COURTESY NATIONAL DANCE INSTITUTE.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OLIVER SCHOLARS (TOP); PROJECT RENEWAL (BOTTOM).

LEARNING TO FLY

Oliver Scholars is teaching New York City kids to soar to new heights

IN 1984, THE GEORGE SCHOOL asked alumnus John Hoffman for his help in recruiting exceptional Black and Latino students, so he approached New York’s superintendent of schools at the time, Albert Oliver, with the idea of forming partnerships with a group of schools—The George School, Westtown School, and the Brooklyn Friends School—and identifying students who might benefit. Hoffman named the organization after Oliver, who died in a car accident the following year. Since that start, 96% of Oliver students graduate from college within five years, and 30% of the program’s graduates go on to attend Ivy League schools.

Danielle Moss, CEO, says, “Oliver has played this unique role over the last 35 years in being an institutional partner around diversity, equity, and inclusion, even before those words were commonly used. Our school partners understood that their graduates would be going out into a world that included all kinds of people. For that reason, we, and our partners have a commitment to ensuring an economic pathway to make diversity happen. They recognize the benefit of partnering with an organization like Oliver, which provides ongoing social, emotional, and academic support.”

Oliver participants get the full benefit of that commitment. In the seventh grade, students are nominated by their schools or their families, and those who meet basic academic requirements are invited to attend an admissions meeting and then to apply. Selected families then attend an interview weekend where they meet Oliver alumni who can answer



specific questions about their experiences. This is an opportunity to assess the students and make sure that the families are ready to provide support for their kids. Says Moss, “We want to ascertain a family’s ability to support students through this journey. Some of our applicants come from highly segregated schools, and this will be a big transition. We pay attention to race, class, and culture, and we want to make sure parents are going to have the backs of their kids as they go through that journey.”

In all, approximately 350 students per year graduate from Oliver programs. Says Moss, “Oliver has three tenets that guide our work: leadership, scholarship, and service. Our young people understand that they have to give back, and they are being given this opportunity because we see leadership potential in them in terms of their family, their community, and in terms of the schools they are attending as well.” For more information, visit oliverscholars.org

GIMME SHELTER

At Project Renewal, the mission is to help New York’s most vulnerable citizens

“IT MAKES PEOPLE DEEPLY

uncomfortable to see someone on the street,” says Eric Rosenbaum, CEO of Project Renewal. “We feel angry and guilty. But I think more than anything, we feel powerless.” He continues, “But that’s why organizations like Project Renewal are so important. Because the handout out on the street makes us feel less guilty. But the system of support that you get with Project Renewal can make a difference.”

Project Renewal was founded in 1967 as a 48-bed alcohol detox center located in the Third Street Shelter. It became one of the most successful programs for addicts, and provided an alternative to incarceration. Since that time, Project Renewal continues to create innovative programs to serve homeless New Yorkers. They house over 2,000 people every night in a system that includes everything from crisis emergency services like detox, to very specialized shelters for people with mental illness and chemical

dependency, as well as the city’s only shelter for LGBTQ youth, Marsha’s House. They make and deliver 2.6 million meals a year, all of them through their culinary arts program, and their events catering enterprise, City Beet Kitchens.

Says Rosenbaum, “Over 50 of our employees are people we train, and now they have a real

career doing meaningful work. The funds from the event catering part go right back into the program to train more people and feed more homeless New Yorkers.”

City Beet has catering contracts for for shelters and senior citizen homes, and the catering arm does everything from continental breakfasts to cocktail parties.



Barbara Hughes, Director of Food Services, says, “The students do hands-on training for 12 weeks, and then they go on an internship, mostly in corporate dining but in some restaurants and institutional settings as well.” She continues, “About 140 people go through the program, and our placement rate in jobs after graduation is about 82%. We give them ongoing support also, to help them keep their jobs.”

Although their work is difficult, Rosenbaum has a positive outlook. He says, “When people hear the word ‘shelter’ they think it’s an awful thing. But the question I’m asking is, what if shelter meant a place to be safe, and to build security so that you can emerge ready to be engaged with your life? What if we really helped people in shelter to find the things they lost along the way? That’s what shelter should be, and that’s what Project Renewal, each and every day, aims to provide.” For more information, visit projectrenewal.org