

Profiles

Four Stories of Resilience from East Side House Members

East Side House Settlement isn't just about support; it's a sanctuary of growth and empowerment. As we mark our 70th year at The Winter Show, we proudly unveil the profound stories of four extraordinary individuals. These stories aren't just about programs; they are living proof of the transformative power within, illustrating the diverse and vital impact of our offerings. Join us in celebrating not just 70 years, but the enduring spirit of opportunity and fulfillment we've cultivated together.

Serah Nawal

Serah Nawal is a Nigerian-American scholar committed to helping marginalized communities navigate the legal system. Her relationship with East Side House began when she was a teenager. After graduating early from Bronx Haven High School, she obtained certifications in both EKG and phlebotomy through the Post-Secondary Pathways program at East Side House. She was then chosen to become a Student Ambassador and participated in East Side House's first educational trip to Europe.

Continuing her education at Ithaca College, Serah discovered her passion for justice and earned a degree in legal studies. She turned to her ESH family for an internship with Natalie Lozada, Associate Executive Director of Programs at East Side House. Due to her excellent work and communication skills, Serah was then referred to a legal internship at Reavis Page Jump LLP, where she worked on employment law and advocacy.

Notably, she wrote an article for the firm's website about the historical significance of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted women the right to vote.

Driving Serah's passion for social change and her aspirations to pursue a career in public interest or litigation work is her belief that all individuals are created equal. A first-generation student herself, who learned English after her family moved to the United States when she was eight, she recognizes the unique challenges that migrant and first-generation school children face. In the future, she wants to return to work in her community to help marginalized people navigate the legal system, especially Black and Brown individuals. Her determination and commitment to advocating for New York's underserved communities make her a phenomenal advocate for change.

"I'm paving the way," she reflects. "I'm making a blueprint for those that are going to do this after I do it."

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Hector Carvajal

A prominent café owner and coffee purveyor, Hector Carvajal got involved with East Side House during high school. He had always been motivated to become a business owner, but by freshman year, he had begun to lose focus. After his mother discovered that he was skipping classes, she sent him to the Dominican Republic to work on his grandfather’s farm for six months.

When he returned to the Bronx, Hector enrolled in Bronx Haven High School, where he initially found out about East Side House. Encouraged by the nurturing relationships he was building with staff at East Side House, Hector’s attitude about his future brightened. “The people from East Side House, they make you feel like they care about you,” he says. “They back you up, and they want you to excel in life.” Through the settlement house, Hector was connected with an internship at New York Life that enriched his understanding of stocks, bonds, and life insurance, and provided him with an introduction to the business world.

As a student at Guttman Community College, Hector began to draw up a business plan for Don Carvajal Café, a local coffee roasting company with a global outreach, inspired by his grandfather’s farm and the richness of Dominican culture. After graduating from Rochester University with a degree in language, media, and communications, he was well positioned to make Don Carvajal a reality. His company prides itself on sourcing ethical and eco-friendly coffee beans from around the world. The coffee is now available in over 60 grocery stores and coffee shops in New York, as well as through Fresh Direct, Amazon, and Montefiore Medical Center. As Hector looks towards the future, he envisions growth, expansion, and his own café.

“I definitely see the world differently because of East Side House. There are people out there that really care about Black and Brown students like us,” he says.



THE THUNDER
CAFE

POSITIVE VIBES
FROM THE
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WASH

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Judy Brandon

Ms. Judy Brandon is a volunteer and class participant at East Side House’s Older Adult Center, where she brings her unique perspective to art and photography classes and champions youth mentorship programs. After leaving South Carolina, she arrived in the Bronx at the age of eight, accompanied by her mother and two sisters, with a limited knowledge of English. Married for 44 years, Ms. Judy takes pride in being a mother of four, a grandmother of 18, and a great-grandmother of one.

At the Older Adult Center, she plays a vital role in the activity planning committee, contributing to the organization of celebrations and activities. Recognizing the wealth of wisdom among older adult members, she has championed programs that enable older adults to mentor community youths. She is an avid learner, always eager to participate in the wide range of activities and classes offered at the Older Adult Center. She is particularly passionate about photography. Through these classes, she sharpened her

photography skills—and even exhibited one of her photographs at the Museum of the City of New York. Deeply passionate about art and culture, she explores different countries and cultures through the other available courses. In addition to the cultural programming, she has been able to take advantage of the Older Adult Center’s myriad resources. In 2019, with the assistance of social workers, she successfully completed an application to secure new housing.

“I love coming to the center and learning about other people, where they came from, their cultures, and traditions,” she says. “I’ve been able to try foods I have never had before during celebrations.”



Deysi Casarubias

Deysi Casarubias first encountered East Side House when her eldest son, a second grader named Luis, was struggling to read. Following the school's recommendation, he was placed in East Side House's Once Upon A Summer enrichment program at P.S. 179. The camp program taught Luis techniques to improve his reading skills and provided Deysi with workshops to learn how she could support her son's reading comprehension. Luis's newfound love for reading influenced his younger brother, Manny, who developed a passion for reading and even skipped a grade. Encouraged by the progress her children made in the summer program, Deysi realized that East Side House was a resource for her family that would be there for her whenever assistance was needed.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and a pregnancy, Deysi and her young family faced housing challenges and were forced to store their belongings and move to a shelter. At a loss as to how to

manage all the challenges, she reached out to East Side House for assistance. With the organization's support, Deysi and her husband were able to complete the necessary paperwork to secure the funds needed to reclaim their possessions from storage. Eventually, the couple found a home for their family, and their church helped them obtain a car.

Today, Deysi works in administration at P.S. 49, where she helps families complete necessary student forms and leading reading workshops. Having experienced so many challenges herself, she is determined to support others to educate their children. Her dedication to her job, community, and family motivates other members of the community. In her free time, Deysi cherishes time with her family, from baking and grilling to reading together and playing board games. Her journey is a testament to her unwavering faith, resilience, and determination to provide her children with fulfilling lives.

To support the important work of East Side House, please visit www.eastsidehouse.org/donate.

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