



STEP UP FOR BETTER LIVING



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

2020 ADDENDUM

THE ONGOING FOOD CRISIS

This year, the Covid-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented crises around the globe. Here in the South Bronx, the impact was especially harsh.

As the epicenter of New York City's outbreak, our community suffered the highest infection rates and the worst death toll in the city. Unemployment skyrocketed to nearly 25% as of July 2020. Food banks reported over a 200% increase in demand. And that's only a snapshot.

In response, Step Up for Better Living mobilized to address residents' urgent needs. We launched an Emergency Food Fund, co-sponsored food distribution pop-ups, received a CCNSF Capacity Building Grant, and helped provide school supplies for South Bronx kids.



BRONXWORKS

Shortly after creating our Emergency Food Fund, we were thrilled to be able to award a \$200,000 grant to BronxWorks, an organization that helps individuals and families improve their economic and social well-being. With these funds, Bronxworks was able to expand its food pantry hours. The Step Up team volunteered to help distribute food and met a client named Leslie and her daughter, Trinity. Trinity loves the swimming classes at BronxWorks. The pandemic closed the pool, of course. But the BronxWorks staff still get to see Trinity and her mom at the food pantry... lucky! Leslie told us they always have a great experience with BronxWorks. She even shares food with her neighbors, some of them elderly and unable to wait in long food pantry lines.

40%

of NYC's soup kitchens and food pantries shut down at the peak of the pandemic.

CAPACITY BUILDING GRANT

It was our honor to receive a \$45,000 Capacity Building Grant through a special initiative of the New York City Council that assists organizations serving communities of color. The Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund (CCNSF) aims to build the capacity of New York City nonprofits and recognizes that organizations led by the people of the community are best equipped to meet the needs of the community they serve.

Step Up is using the funds received from CCNSF to design a management information system to improve methods of data collection and reporting of services delivered to clients.

25%

According to July reports, unemployment in the Bronx is nearing 25%.



POP-UPS

For over 6,000 individuals in the South Bronx, the nearest food pantry was closer than ever in June and July. That's because of three pop-up food distribution events co-sponsored by Step Up for Better Living! Of course, none of it would have been possible without the help of our co-sponsors. The team at Food Bank for New York City exhibited overwhelming generosity in providing nutritious food to the families we serve. The staff from Wavecrest Management did a tremendous job organizing many initiatives, such as moving boxes and distributing food. And of course, the Step Up team was tireless in reaching out to clients, distributing literature, lifting boxes, and serving families.

28.4%

The Bronx's household poverty rate, 28.4%, is 63% higher than Manhattan, and 127% higher than national rate of 12.3%.

Step Up for Better Living announces the creation of the **Step Up Emergency Food Fund Campaign** to raise \$5M to fight food insecurity in the South Bronx—starting with our \$500k contribution to local food pantries.



HELP US REACH OUR GOAL OF \$5M TO FIGHT FOOD INSECURITY

Nearly everyone is feeling the effects of Covid-19 now, but for those who were already facing food insecurity, the impact is especially harsh. The increased demand for food has been exponential. The organizations we surveyed reported up to a 200% increase in demand. Shortages of food, volunteers, and personal protective equipment (PPE) also continue to be a problem. As a result, long lines form around food pantries, and clients often wait hours to be served. Sometimes, food pantries do not have enough to meet the demand and have to turn away people seeking food.



THE STEP UP EMERGENCY FOOD FUND FOR THE SOUTH BRONX

The Step Up Emergency Food Fund was created to immediately get food in the hands of families who desperately need it. Step Up's approach is to provide organizations access to funding to purchase food, add staff, and purchase PPE.

GIVE WHAT YOU CAN TO ADDRESS THIS DIRE NEED

You can help to address this dire need by [donating through our secure portal](#). You can also contact me at l.rodriguez@sablnc.org to learn more about the Step Up Emergency Food Fund.

- Louis Rodriguez, Executive Director

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Step Up for Better Living (Step Up) spent 2019 planning for the future to create a roadmap for the agency to grow over the next three years. Priorities included acquiring more space and hiring more staff to meet the growing need for client services. Other challenges were more strategic: How can Step Up develop a plan for future growth? How can Step Up diversify funding, and which funders should we approach? The following describes ways that Step Up addressed four key challenges and the steps that we will take to grow the agency.

Acquiring New Office Space: Our new office at 424 East 147th Street in the Melrose section of the Bronx is strategically located to provide services to people in need. In 2019, the agency acquired 3,011 square feet of office space, which includes a community kitchen, conference room, and enough space to accommodate additional staff. Step Up now has increased capacity to offer housing assistance to families facing eviction, crisis intervention, nutrition counseling, and comprehensive services for seniors who need access to Social Security Assistance, Meals on Wheels, and more.

Building Fundraising Capacity: Over a three-month period in the Spring of 2019, the Step Up board and staff developed an Individual Donor Cultivation Plan that was funded by a grant from the New York City Council. When the planning was completed, Step Up had improved fundraising capacity by developing fundraising software and providing board training that improved our ability to recruit and retain individual donors.

Conducting Strategic Planning: In October 2019, the Step Up board and staff engaged in a long-range planning process that culminated in the development of a three-year plan. The new mission, helping people in need achieve and sustain stability, wellness, and self-sufficiency, is the foundation upon which all new and existing programs will be developed. The plan includes objectives that will be the benchmarks for success. These benchmarks were designed to be measurable, specific, and realistic and will be used by Step Up to guide decision making and to measure our accomplishments. Step Up is now better positioned to accomplish its operational and strategic objectives.

Improving Technology to Increase Productivity: With the addition of a new office and more staff, Step Up faced logistical issues that had to be addressed. They include connecting staff working at different locations, organizing workflows to meet project deadlines, and expanding the program's capacity to communicate with external organizations. In December 2019, our new IT vendor enabled staff to communicate and share information online. As a result, staff gained increased flexibility in scheduling meetings and increased ability to connect with community partners.



Louis Rodriguez, Ph.D., MBA, MSW

Each year, Step Up helps low-income families struggling to make ends meet.

In 2019, Step Up increased its capacity to evaluate its data, and we learned that more than three-quarters (**76%**) of the families we serve were headed by **single-parent females** who had an average income of \$15,321. The two greatest challenges for these families were paying rent and putting food on the table. For the second consecutive year, rent arrears increased among the families we serve. Many of them are rent stressed—they pay more than 30% of their income for rent. Step Up social work staff provided assistance by helping families access emergency rental subsidies and by negotiating repayment plans to pay rent arrears. To address the growing problem of food insecurity, Step Up expanded its onsite nutrition program to teach families how to stretch the food budget and to make healthy food choices for adults and children. In 2020, Step Up prioritizes helping families who are at high risk of becoming homeless by conducting intensive monitoring and following up to ensure that they have the support and services they need to pay rent and have access to food.

76%

of the families served in 2019 were headed by single-parent females

\$15,321

average Income of families served

98%

Eviction Prevention Rate

Majority of the families served resided in Community Board 2, Hunts Point

OUR IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS



368
total family members



85

number
of clients
receiving
counseling

131

number of
families receiving
housing
assistance

46

number of
evictions
prevented

\$190,772

in client arrears

Step Up assisted clients by helping them get
one-shot deals and repayment plans



125

clients participated in cultural
and recreational activities



70

clients participated in nutrition
groups



50

clients participated in holiday
programs



50

average age
of head of
household

51

total number
of seniors
served

STEP UP 2019 CULTURAL/HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES



STEP UP 2019 ANNUAL SENIOR TRIP

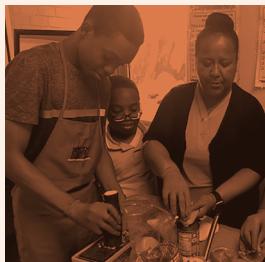
During the 2019 winter holiday season, Step Up took 21 seniors on our annual Senior Trip to see “Ain’t Too Proud—The Life & Times of the Temptations” on Broadway. The moment the seniors entered the Imperial Theater, they became very excited. The story line was the Temptations’ journey from the streets of Detroit to Motown to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. With their choreographed dance moves and their unmistakable harmonies, the Temptations rose to the top of the charts, creating an incredible 42 top 10 hits, 14 of which reached number one. One of our seniors declared, “The show was a smash hit.” Another said, “It was energetic and entertaining.”



A GAZILLION BUBBLES SHOW OFF BROADWAY

On November 9, 2019, Step Up took 40 children to see the Gazillion Bubbles Show off Broadway. The children were amazed by the spellbinding laser show, which featured an entertainer who picked up laser lights and placed them at various locations on the stage to the beat of the music. They were all fascinated when a gazillion bubbles started floating through the theater as the lights were illuminated off them. One youth exclaimed, “I’m in bubble heaven!”

STEP UP CELEBRATES **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**



I have just finished my second cycle of leading Nutrition and Health workshops with the adult participants at Step Up for Better Living (Step Up) located in the Bronx. It has been quite a rewarding experience. I have also had the opportunity to work with the youths during the summer months. What I loved most about working with the adult participants at Step Up was watching them go from making unhealthy choices to being excited to share the healthy recipes, with their families. One of the participants enhanced a recipe from the fruits and vegetables lesson that she enjoyed. The recipe consisted of whole grains, vegetables, and beans as a protein. She decided to add a variety of vegetables to the recipe (which is what we at Cornell promote) and brought samples for the entire class to try at graduation. She was very proud of her new creation, and everyone enjoyed it.

- Nedra Jones
Community Educator



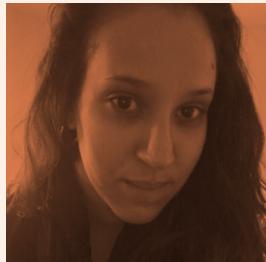
RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS



Step Up hosted a Board Game event on December 23, 2019, during the public school system's holiday break. The target group was children between the ages of 8 and 17. The board games were Connect4, Trouble, Game of Life, Monopoly, Checkers, Candyland, and Uno. The purpose of the event was to afford the youths a forum to interact with their peers without distractions from the television, computers, and cell phones.

- **Andrew Thomas, Jr.**
Program Director





My name is Fiorella Telles, and I am a mother of two and a current member of “Step Up for Better Living (SUBL).” Since joining the program, I was invited to a nutrition class sponsored by Cornell University. The class was very informative, and the instructor was friendly and relatable. I was able to take what I learned and actually implement it into my grocery shopping and cooking routine. Especially when you are on a budget but still want to eat healthy. I received a gift card to our local supermarket to buy fresh foods and put into practice what we learned—which was very helpful as I wanted to continue to eat healthier and stay on budget. We also prepared meals together, and it was a pleasant experience socializing, getting to know some of my neighbors who I otherwise wouldn’t have met. Step up for Better Living is a program that has helped me in so many ways. I can count on Ms. Waters, Mr. Thomas, Ms. Campos, and the rest of the staff to help with any of my management needs, food pantry, and so much more. Especially during this hard time we are all facing today. SUBL has helped me by sending me a monthly \$25 gift card, and it has been a tremendous help.

- **Fiorella Telles**

Age 33

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STAFF

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Case Worker

Arlene Rojas

Case Worker

Jayliza Reyes

Intern

OUR SUPPORTERS

Taproot Foundation

New York City Council



WWW.SUBLNYC.ORG



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A copy of the latest Step Up for Better Living annual financial report may be obtained, upon request, from Step Up for Better Living or from the New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau. Requests can be submitted to Step Up for Better Living at 424 East 147th Street, Bronx, New York 10455 or by writing to the Charities Bureau at Charities Bureau, 28 Liberty Street, 19th Floor, New York, New York 10005.