






5 Ideas

For a Better NYC

In 2025, New Yorkers will go to the polls to elect our Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, all our City Council representatives, and all the Borough Presidents. These officials have the power to shape the City in significant ways, and candidates are likely to make sweeping promises on the campaign trail to secure votes.

United Neighborhood Houses created this tool to assist candidates to develop specific plans – and to help community members hold candidates accountable for their promises. This series outlines five big ideas every candidate running for office should consider to give all New Yorkers the support they need to live, work, raise a family, and age here.

5 Ideas For a Better NYC is broken down by the following ideas elected leaders should embrace:

	For a Better Child Care System
	To Support Youth and Young Adults
	To Help Older Adults Age in their Communities
	To Support Immigrant New Yorkers
	For Bolstering the Human Services Sector

Why trust UNH?

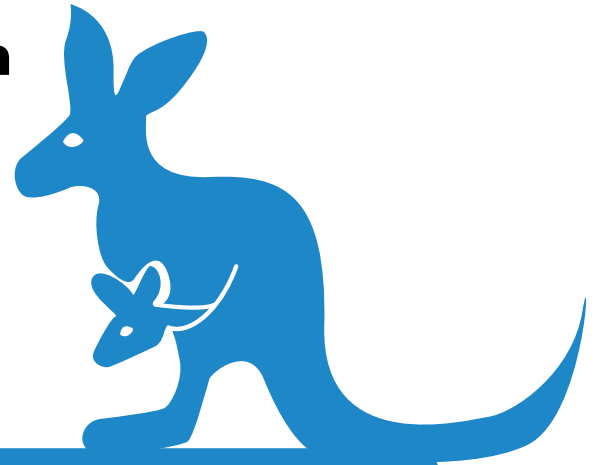
With all the pressures facing New Yorkers and the City, we have to take big, bold ideas and turn them into reality. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) and our settlement house members know from experience that promises are just words without specific plans to back them up, and although people often run for office because they want to improve lives, they don't always know where to begin once they are elected.

The settlement house movement has fought to make New York City a better place to live for more than 100 years. UNH has worked alongside – and at times in opposition to – 23 different mayoral administrations. We have led and won campaigns focused on public health, housing, the rights of women, children, and immigrants, and more. We know what it takes to realize ambitious goals, and we are ready to work with the City's future leaders to make all of these big ideas happen.

5 Ideas

For a Better Child Care System

Not only do working families rely on child care; quality early education programs can set young children up for successful futures. More than a century ago, settlement houses started New York's first child care programs. The City has made tremendous strides in expanding access to early childhood education since then, but the current system is piecemeal and operationally challenged. To meet the needs of New York's children and families, policymakers can:



1

Commit to a free, universal system of accessible and conveniently-located care

Currently, around 80% of families struggle with the cost of child care. The lack of affordable child care is driving parents out of the workforce and families out of the City.¹

- **Publicly commit to a universal system** of close-to-home child care offering full days for a full year, without restricting access based on income or immigration status
- **Invest in existing 3-K programs** to ensure classrooms have the resources they need
- **Expand the 3-K system** to guarantee seats for every family that applies and advertise this broadly

2

Begin to build a universal 2s program

Expanding free care options to 2-year-olds is the next logical step for New York City's universal childcare system. Although there are already some publicly subsidized child care programs available,² the majority of care available for the City's approximately 90,000 2-year-olds is in private market settings with families shouldering the entire cost.³

- **Draw on existing licensed capacity for expansion**, beginning in child-care deserts
- **Publicly commit to a timeline to reach 60,000 seats**, which is estimated to be universal 2-care

1. New Yorkers United for Childcare, *UPC: A Five year Roadmap for Universal Public Child Care*, <https://www.united4childcare.org/upcny>

2. Only 20% of eligible toddlers in NYC receive child care subsidies

3. Currently, care for 2 year olds costs an average of \$23,400 per year, which is far out of reach for most New York City residents.

3

Make it as easy to apply as possible

Families miss out on child care because the application process is complicated and inefficient. The MyCity Portal is only for subsidized child care programs; MySchools is just for Pre-K and 3-K applications; and Head Start programs have a separate application process.

- **Create a one-stop-shop** to apply for care where families can compare options and complete their applications with the assistance of a navigator who can answer questions and provide technical support
- **Advertise care options** through every avenue possible such as nonprofits, houses of worship, pediatrician's offices, online and television ads, and even cold calls to eligible families

4

Pay staff their worth

Early childhood educators play a crucial role in a child's development, but those in center-based and family child care settings are not compensated at the same level as their school-based counterparts – even though the credentials are the same. Salary parity would mean an equal base rate that also accounts for the additional hours worked by center- and family-based educators. Lack of salary parity threatens the long-term stability of the City's child care infrastructure.⁴

- **Renegotiate contracts for early childhood educators** in center- and family-based child care settings mirroring agreements reached for public school teachers and staff
- **Extend wage investments to all child care staff**, regardless of program or union affiliation, including pre-school special education staff

5

Meet legally-mandated special education services requirements

In 2024 14,400 Pre-K students with disabilities ended the school year without receiving support services the City is legally mandated to provide. This violates civil rights laws, and is shameful in a City as well-resourced as New York.

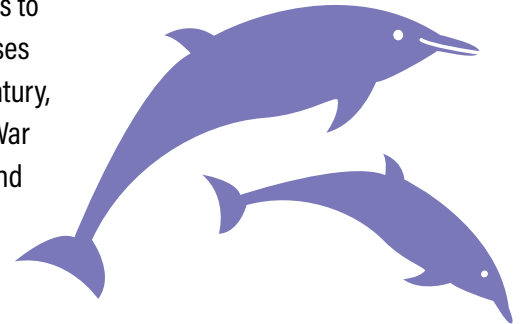
- **Invest in new, dedicated classrooms** for students with special needs
- **Boost the amount of staff** providing supportive therapies
- **Fund evaluations for services** so they are efficient and accessible, and ensure that referral partnerships are in place and ready to receive students when a need is identified

4. Day Care Council of New York, *The Enduring Value of the Early Education Workforce*, <https://www.dccnyinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Enduring-Value-of-the-Early-Childhood-Workforce-9-2023-2.pdf>

5 Ideas

To Support Youth and Young Adults

Youth development programs expand minds and opportunities, connect families to essential supports, and help youth navigate challenging times. Settlement houses have played a leading role in supporting New York City's youth over the last century, pushing to expand afterschool programs across the five boroughs after World War II and helping to lead the Positive Youth Development movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Young people need more options to connect with one another and build community. To create those spaces, policymakers can:



1

Commit to a free, universal system of afterschool programs

Afterschool programs improve academic performance, reduce chronic absenteeism, enhance mental and physical well-being, and prepare young people for success.¹ The current afterschool system only serves a small portion of the families who need it.

- **Publicly commit to a plan for universal afterschool programming** for elementary and middle schoolers
- **Invest more in traditional afterschool programs for high schoolers**, as well as Student Success Centers, Learning to Work, and Work, Learn, Grow
- **Remove barriers to afterschool participation** for students with disabilities and those in temporary housing by providing post-program bussing, and for English language learners by increasing salaries to attract multilingual staff

2

Fully fund existing afterschool contracts

For more than a decade, afterschool contracts have been extended without increasing rates to account for rising costs. To ensure programming is high-quality, New York City must pay providers the true cost of providing these services.

- **Commit to phasing in higher funding rates** for afterschool programs in line with UNH's assessment of the true cost of afterschool²
- **Initiate a new procurement for afterschool contracts** with fully funded rates and an updated program design developed in conversation with families, providers, and advocates

1. Afterschool Alliance. "Evaluating Afterschool: The Latest Research on the Impact of Afterschool and Summer Programs," September 2024. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/The-Latest-Research-on-the-Impact-of-Afterschool-and-Summer-Programs-2024.pdf>

2. From UNH's Analysis: [Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City](#)

3

Offer additional free summer programming options to give families choices

Summer programming offers benefits for all young people: extended outside play, post-secondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning. Higher-income families can afford private programs based on their children's interests, but low-income families often rely on the prevailing city-funded program, Summer Rising. Families who rely on free summer programming want more choices.³

- **Review the curricula covered in Summer Rising classrooms** and assess the impact this portion of the day is having on students' academic performance during the school year
- **Fund more summer programming models** to respond to the diverse needs and interests of young people

4

Create a roadmap for universal SYEP

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) not only provides young people with valuable exposure to work and career opportunities, but also acts as a key economic support to low-income communities. The program could have a much bigger impact if every applicant was guaranteed a spot.

- **Continue to develop SYEP infrastructure** and leverage the City's influence to involve even more New York City businesses and agencies as employers for the program
- **Invest in a curriculum that builds on itself year after year**, giving recurring participants the chance to develop basic job skills and to level up in subsequent years to more substantial roles

5

Treat SYEP as a Pipeline Into Year-Round Employment Programs

While SYEP offers youth a valuable opportunity to gain job experience and career exposure, improve their academic performance, and increase their self-confidence, it has little known long-term impact on employability.⁴ Work, Learn, Grow (WLG), the year-round companion program to SYEP, allows youth to continue gaining workforce experience during the school year.

- **Expand funding for Work, Learn, Grow programs** to eventually support 30% of SYEP participants, giving young people more opportunities to continue earning income and gaining work experience during the academic year

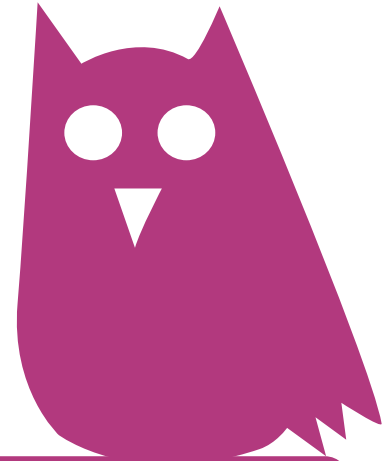
3. From UNH's Study: [One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families](#).

4. Department of Labor. "An Introduction to the World of Work: A Study of the Implementation and Impacts of New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program," April 2017. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/SYEP-Full-Report.pdf>

5 Ideas

To Help Older Adults Age in Their Communities

New York City's older adult population is growing rapidly. From senior centers, to social services, to home-delivered meals, to intergenerational programming with older adults and young people, settlement house programs help seniors stay at home longer. This improves their quality of life and reduces incidents of expensive emergency interventions. To ensure our aging population can remain safely in their communities, policymakers can:



1 Invest in and expand programming in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

NORCs are buildings and neighborhoods with a high concentration of older people. NORC programs offer services, health care, and activities to help older adults age in place, improving their quality-of-life and delivering a tremendous return on investment in reduced emergency interventions. Many communities with booming older adult populations lack these programs.¹

- **Establish at least one new NORC program in every Council district** with an increasing older adult population and in areas with few or inaccessible resources
- **Invest in existing NORC programs** to ensure older adults have the resources they need to remain safely in their homes and communities for as long as possible

2 Address food insecurity among older adults

Food insecurity remains very high among older New Yorkers. Home-delivered meals and senior centers that offer meals urgently need additional resources to meet demand.

- **Expand funding for grab-and-go meals** to interested older adult centers
- **Fund more than one meal per day** for home-delivered meals to ensure homebound seniors have enough to eat
- **Deepen investments in existing food programs** to ensure that chronically under-funded nonprofits can continue food to seniors

1. Seven out of the 20 community districts in the City with the largest increases in their older adult share of the population over the past decade do not have a NORC program. For example, the older adult population in Queens Community District 13 rose by nearly eight percent over the past decade, but there is no NORC in this community district.

3

Prioritize benefits enrollment programs so that no penny is left on the table

Utilizing state and federal benefits to the greatest extent possible gives older adults improved economic security and helps our economy by boosting support and spending. Programs like NYC Benefits, where staff use a holistic approach to help older adults access benefits like SNAP and Medicaid ensure that no penny is left on the table.

- **Scale up benefits outreach programs** like NYC Benefits in all senior-serving programs
- **Increase funding to expand case management programs** to address the needs of older adults
- **Prioritize local, in-person, and one-to-one support** for individuals navigating benefits applications for fewer application errors leading to a rise in successfully-completed applications

4

Invest in flexible, community-based mental health services

The City's older adult population has many mental health needs, and our epidemic of social isolation is only making matters worse. Older adults who live alone or have mobility issues are especially vulnerable, and a community-based approach is key.

- **Expand and invest in community-based Geriatric Mental Health services**, which identify mental health needs, provide interventions, and offer references to psychiatric treatment when necessary
- **Build and strengthen partnerships with local clinics** to improve access to critical mental health services
- **Prioritize funding programs that combat social isolation** through one-on-one and group interactions

5

Create Intergenerational Community Centers

Intergenerational community centers build upon the strengths, interests, and assets of older adults and position them as an important community resource for the greater good. These centers create multi-aged social networks that help participants thrive in the communities they know and love.

- **Encourage collaboration between the Department of Youth and Community Development and NYC Aging** to better support intergenerational community centers
- **Fund intergenerational coordinator staff lines** so organizations that have programs for both youth and seniors can intentionally create more opportunities for those populations to interact

5 Ideas

To Support Immigrant New Yorkers

New York is a city of immigrants, and ensuring access to housing, employment, and education for newly arrived New Yorkers helps them transition, and strengthens the City's social and economic system. Settlement houses have helped immigrants settle in New York City for more than a century, and one way they do so is by offering services that are open and welcoming. Rather than creating dedicated stand-alone programs for immigrants, policymakers can emphasize coordinating city-wide services to streamline their access to existing resources:



1 Ensure that anyone who wants to learn English can

Adult literacy programs serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being. Despite the need for community-based adult literacy programs¹ fewer than 3% of English language learners are able to access classes due to inadequate public funding.

- **Expand options for adult literacy** education programs
- **Lift geographic restrictions on programming** so that qualified providers can serve immigrants wherever they are located
- **Explore remote learning opportunities** for adult literacy and education classes, which worked well during the pandemic and are more accessible to adults with caregiving or job responsibilities

2 Give people real, coordinated support as they start a new life in New York City

All New Yorkers benefit when immigrants have the support they need to become financially stable, but there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Robust supports help people become financially independent.

- **Invest in expanded resettlement programming** including case management, with benefits navigation and housing placement, legal services, and assistance completing legal forms such as work authorizations
- **Support learning and education** by offering English as a second language and literacy classes, providing workforce training/skills building classes, and assisting with identifying and applying for jobs

1. In New York City, an estimated 2 million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma

3

Restore a right to shelter for immigrants

For decades, New Yorkers with nowhere else to turn have been able to access emergency shelters. Putting time limits on shelter stays for asylum-seeking families threatens their progress towards self-sufficiency by interrupting work, school, and program participation.

- **Eliminate shelter limits** for asylum seekers to maintain the City's right to shelter mandate
- **Ensure families with young children** have uninterrupted housing during the school year, as moving disrupts educational progress, upends child care, and threatens parents' progress towards work authorization and employment

4

Provide a safe learning environment for immigrant children

Immigrant children must have access to year-round educational, social, and language supports. When immigrant children are safe and cared for, immigrant parents can work, learn English, and acclimate to a new environment more rapidly.

- **Baseline and expand childcare options** for immigrants
- **Hire additional school counselors and social workers** to support the unique needs of immigrant families and their children
- **Instruct schools to take steps to protect immigrant students** by refusing to cooperate with non-local law enforcement

5

Uphold New York City's sanctuary laws and policies

New York is a city of immigrants, and our sanctuary city status has enabled everyone to participate in public life together. When our sanctuary city status is questioned, it leads to a chilling effect with many undocumented New Yorkers staying home. No one benefits when immigrants stop participating in adult literacy education, workforce programming, or educational programs.

- **Give clear guidance to city employees and city contractors** on our sanctuary city laws
- **Ensure that New York City Public Schools remain safe for all students** regardless of documentation status

5 Ideas

for Bolstering the Human Services Sector

New Yorkers from all walks of life rely on the human services sector to thrive. Despite counting on nonprofits to run early childhood education, youth development programs, services for older adults and immigrants, and more, New York City has failed to be a good partner to this vital sector. To stabilize human services and ensure New Yorkers have the programming they need, policymakers can:



1

Register contracts on time and create procurement process timeframes

Currently, there are no set timeframes for the majority of New York City's procurement processes. As a consequence, it takes so long to register many human service contracts that providers end up delivering programs before the contract is finalized to prevent people from going without vital services.

- **Add timeframes throughout the City's procurement process** – from concept paper through contract registration – to create accountability and ensure nonprofits are paid on time
- **Publicly report on adherence to timeframes** so that delays can be caught and addressed quickly

2

Pay on time (and pay interest if the City is late)

Paying nonprofits on time should be non-negotiable. No other sector would be asked to wait years for reimbursement on incurred costs. Nonprofits often have to draw down lines of credit and accrue interest while they wait to get paid, which means they effectively give the City interest-free loans.

- **Pay providers on time and in full** for their important work
- **Pay interest on late payments** to counterbalance providers' additional expenses

3

Provide regular COLAs and build towards salary parity

Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) are important to ensure contracts – and worker salaries – keep up with inflation. However, human service contracts are severely underfunded, meaning COLAs have a limited impact. Plainly, we cannot “COLA” our way out of this problem. New York City needs to invest in higher wages for contracted human service workers.

- **Make annual COLAs automatic** to retain staff and attract a more robust pool of potential employees
- **Publicly commit to a pathway to parity** between human services and City workers doing the same work

4 Pay what it costs to deliver high-quality programs

Reimbursement rates for many human service programs are so low that providers often end up losing money the more people they serve. This problem is exacerbated by the City's tendency to extend contracts for years and sometimes decades without increasing budgets.

- **Raise contract rates for human service programs** to ensure that the programs are high-quality and best meet the existing need
- **Implement automatic annual cost inflators** to ensure rates rise when contracts are extended
- **Develop model budgets for human service programs** in partnership with providers to see where additional investment is needed

5 Use multiple data sources to identify need

With so much diversity between New York City's neighborhoods, it can be challenging to determine how to distribute limited resources. However, when City agencies use narrow criteria to create and site social services programs, neighborhoods with hidden needs can lose out.¹ "Pockets of poverty" exist throughout the five boroughs – particularly where public housing developments are not represented in community-level data due to adjacent high-income, gentrified neighborhoods.

- **Instruct agencies to work with the Department of City Planning**, which has multiple kinds of datasets available, to understand the needs of a neighborhood before creating program parameters
- **Never bar nonprofits from applying in procurements based on geography** as they may be able to make a compelling case for hyper-local needs

1. For example, in 2020, when the Department of Education re-bid its Birth to Five child care system, several providers working in NYCHA developments were not awarded enough funds to continue their work. These developments were located in gentrifying neighborhoods, where median incomes obscured the lower incomes of NYCHA residents. In 2024, when DYCD re-bid its Adult Literacy Programs, they identified several Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs) where they determined there were low rates of literacy. NTAs did not account for shelters that housed asylum seekers, and the narrow geographical focus ignored the fact that adults will often travel for educational services, especially if they are near places of employment.