



# Innovations in the Field

**L\*E\*S\*E\*N**

**LOWER EAST SIDE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK**

## **About *Innovations in the Field***

*Innovations in the Field* is a series examining programs supported by JobsFirstNYC that serve both employers seeking job-ready workers and young adults in New York City looking to access employment and training opportunities. These programs are innovative in two respects: how workforce providers engage as partners with employers, and how providers collaborate rather than compete with one another. They illustrate best practices in young adult workforce development and address service gaps, on both the demand side and the supply side, that otherwise might deter many young adults from entering career-track work.

## **About JobsFirstNYC**

JobsFirstNYC is a neutral intermediary and a champion for the workforce needs of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults in New York City. Our mission is to improve the system for young adults by bringing together—effectively and efficiently—all available community, corporate, private, and public resources to accelerate the connection of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults with the economic life of New York City.

# Introduction

Perhaps nowhere in New York City are the disparities between wealth and poverty as pronounced as on Manhattan's Lower East Side, including Chinatown. The area's approximately 160,000 residents live among high-end restaurants, art galleries, and a vibrant cultural and nightlife scene, yet many in the community are struggling: a 2013 analysis found that about 30 percent of residents live in households with an annual income of less than \$20,000. In 2010, the area's median income was \$43,518, about \$20,000 less than the median for all of Manhattan.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of community residents who receive public assistance or live in public housing is far above the citywide average; in total, 50 percent of residents received some form of income support.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the area's poverty rate as of 2010 was 22 percent, slightly higher than the citywide rate—and among 18- to 24-year-olds, the rate was 35.4 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Woven into the fabric of the Lower East Side are a number of longstanding and highly regarded nonprofit social service organizations that offer a wide range of services to help community residents cope with the challenges of poverty and gain the skills and experiences necessary to work their way up the economic ladder. As the area became a hot spot for growth and development during the previous decade, it became clear that these organizations could strengthen their efforts to connect local residents, particularly youth and young adults, to the job opportunities then emerging in the community. In 2007, a number of these providers created the Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN) to better serve residents seeking work opportunities. JobsFirstNYC provided a facilitator and other resources to support planning discussions and to help develop the new partnership.

During its first few years, the Network was informal and limited by a lack of resources, which were particularly stretched due to the onset of the Great Recession. Nevertheless, program directors and job developers from the partner organizations remained committed to the concept, meeting periodically and sharing large-scale job opportunities with one another, while awaiting the opportunity to transform LESEN into a sustainable model.

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**As an intermediary, JobsFirstNYC was interested in supporting structures that could bring together workforce providers in a context where all could benefit—in other words, helping shift the dynamic in the field from competition to collaboration.**

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That opportunity emerged in 2011 when JobsFirstNYC, which had provided modest support for LESEN since its inception, invested significant resources to help the Network hire a full-time coordinator. As an intermediary, JobsFirstNYC was interested in supporting structures that could bring together workforce providers in a context where all could benefit—in other words, helping shift the dynamic in the field from competition to collaboration. The idea was that the Network's coordinator would serve as a single point of contact for collective recruitment by pre-screening candidates and thus ensuring higher quality referrals and fewer interviews per hire.

Once the new coordinator was in place, LESEN quickly began to produce strong results. Between March 2012 and March 2015, the Network made 187 job placements with average starting wages of \$10.77 per hour; in 2015, this wage rose to \$11.52. The partner organizations also refined their pitch to employers, improved internal protocols, and began to share best practices and referrals for services. Today, in light of several major imminent developments on the Lower East Side set to offer employment opportunities in construction, hospitality, retail, and other sectors, LESEN is poised for a dramatic increase in activity—and could emerge as a citywide model for collaboration among providers of workforce services within a specific geographic area.

This paper, the second in JobsFirstNYC's *Innovations in the Field* series, details the origins, evolution, and larger implications of LESEN. For JobsFirstNYC, LESEN represents something different: it serves the full range of jobseeker candidates, with young adults an important but not exclusive population of focus. With New York City shifting its approach to workforce development by focusing on long-term outcomes and developing a system that emphasizes partnership and collaboration, the experience of LESEN offers valuable guidance for the workforce community.

# Origins

As new hotel development emerged in the Lower East Side in 2004 and 2005, local service providers and public officials alike began to think about how best to ensure that community residents could benefit from employment opportunities stemming from the new projects. Two prominent provider organizations, Henry Street Settlement and University Settlement Society/The Door, saw strong prospects for residents in this regard—and determined that although the two organizations might lack the capacity to fill large job orders on their own, working together would allow them to do so.

“To define a single point of access for developers, we needed coordination and partnership,” recalls David Garza, then workforce development director and now executive director of Henry Street Settlement. “Looking out the window, knowing that this development was coming, it was clear we’d need to work together as opposed to compete.”

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**“From a philosophical perspective, we liked the idea of collaborating rather than competing with peer organizations with similar missions,” says Julie Shapiro of The Door.**

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“We wanted to respond to the gentrification of the Lower East Side, and to the growing hospitality industry within the neighborhood,” adds Julie Shapiro, executive director of The Door. “We also wanted to expand the range of job opportunities we offered to our jobseekers, especially those that wouldn’t necessarily land the jobs on their own. And from a philosophical perspective, we liked the idea of collaborating rather than competing with peer organizations with similar missions.”

At the same time, members of Community Board 3—which covers the area spanning from the Brooklyn Bridge to 14th Street and from the Bowery to the East River, including historic Chinatown—were looking for ways to encourage

## **CMP (formerly Chinatown Manpower Project)**

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1972

**TARGET POPULATION:** Asian Americans in New York City

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** Adult Literacy; CMP Academy (which offers training courses for certified nurse aides, EKG technicians, phlebotomy technicians, freight forwarders, and accounting professionals)

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2007 (founding partner)

developers to hire local residents for the new jobs stemming from their activities. While Community Board 3 did not require local hiring commitments, its members worked with developers and businesses to stress the importance of creating opportunities for local residents. According to Community Board 3 district manager Susan Stetzer, an important leader in the formation of LESEN, employers have been eager to engage with the community for practical and public relations reasons: “This community is becoming a host for their industry, and they need to be connected to us.”

With these considerations in mind, Community Board 3 and provider organizations began to explore a possible partnership among themselves and with several new hotels in the community. By 2007, five local providers—the Bowery Residents’ Committee, CMP (formerly Chinatown Manpower Project), and Chinese-American Planning Council, in addition to Henry Street and The Door—formed the Lower East Side Employment Network.

At the outset, LESEN’s scope was relatively limited, with a focus on helping hotels hire staff for grand openings. JobsFirstNYC provided the Network with a consultant who facilitated

discussions among participating organizations to strategize the filling of job orders; and Henry Street hosted a series of hiring events. One of the original partner organizations, the Bowery Residents' Committee, withdrew from the collaboration, while Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES) joined. (Another new member, Grand Street Settlement, joined in 2014.)

Despite the organizations' ongoing commitment to the idea of LESEN, the Network's dynamics—characterized by competition among member organizations for public contracts, philanthropic funds, and job orders, as well as logistical and accountability-related challenges—proved difficult to manage without dedicated staff. “We couldn't do this on a shoestring as a side piece of our work,” explains Andrea Vaghy-Benyola, managing director for career and education services at The Door, who helped oversee candidate screening during the early years of LESEN.

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### **Despite the partners' ongoing commitment to LESEN, the dynamics of competition among member organizations, as well as challenges around logistics and accountability, proved difficult to manage without dedicated staff.**

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But the original motivations behind the Network—to seize the opportunities presented by new development, to increase organizational capacity by working together to fill large job orders, and to offer a wider set of services to clients—remained in place. Further, new planned development in the community continued even through the Great Recession and the ensuing slow recovery.

While LESEN is a demand-led initiative designed to help employers address their hiring needs, one component of the project that JobsFirstNYC found compelling was the prevalence of young adults in the Lower East Side—and their high rates of poverty. If the model proved effective, the collaboration could make a considerable dent in JobsFirstNYC's goal of reducing the number of out-of-school, out-of-work young adult New York City residents by 5 percent by 2017.

Further, leaders of LESEN's partner organizations explained to JobsFirstNYC that one significant “pain point” for many of their employer partners was the issue of redundancy and overlap among providers: too often, several of the partner organizations would separately approach the same employers to offer their services and refer candidates. The leaders felt that creating a formal coordination mechanism among their organizations would not only better serve employers but also save time, energy, and resources for everyone involved.

With those considerations in mind, in 2011, JobsFirstNYC stepped forward with a commitment of resources to support LESEN. “When meeting with the leadership of the LESEN partner organizations, it was clear they had a great concept and institutional relationships,” recalls JobsFirstNYC executive director Lou Miceli. “But to bring the concept to life, they needed resources to formalize and operationalize the model. When I asked specifically how we could help, they said they needed a coordinator.”



# LESEN Today

Gaspar Caro became LESEN's coordinator in March 2012. His key responsibility is to manage the Network—for example, by organizing monthly meetings with the liaisons from each partner organization, screening candidates referred from the partners for job openings, maintaining LESEN's database and social media presence, facilitating referrals for training and other services across partner organizations, and troubleshooting partnership-related issues. He also serves as LESEN's primary point of contact for employers. In that capacity, he regularly receives leads and introductions from Community Board 3.

Liaisons from the partner organizations find particular value in the added capacity for engaging potential employers. "Gaspar has expanded our employer list," says Annette Montalvo, director of the hospitality training program for the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC). "Having the relationship with Community Board 3, they let him know what businesses are being developed and suggest he reach out."

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**Objective feedback from coordinator Gaspar Caro, other partners, and sometimes even employers on why a candidate is or is not referred to a job interview or ultimately hired is extremely valuable as LESEN members work to refine and improve their programs.**

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Caro describes his role as helping LESEN partner organizations stay connected with one another and keeping them up to date on long-term projects in the community. He shares best practices, serves as a sounding board for the liaisons, pre-screens job candidates, and gives feedback that the partner organizations use to refine their programs. "I'm not an employer, but I have a strong sense of employer needs," he explains. "That helps them test the waters with jobseekers before sending them out to interview." Several liaisons echoed this sentiment, noting that objective feedback—from

Caro, other partners, and sometimes even employers—on why a candidate is or is not referred to a job interview or ultimately hired is extremely valuable.

In addition to requiring expertise in helping candidates find and keep employment, running LESEN requires diplomatic skills and a sense of the dynamics among organizations traditionally geared more toward competition than collaboration. Each organization aims to secure job placements as required by its public contracts or private grants, meaning that the partners must determine rules of the road for referrals and outcomes when more than one provider is involved. In this regard, LESEN is designed as a "hub and spoke" model; until now, however, virtually all activity has gone through the hub. Caro and others cite the need for additional steps to help guide clients of the different partners "across the spokes" to services outside the provider organization that initially served them.

Regarding the differences among partner organizations, Caro believes that the challenges are cultural as well as operational. "GOLES has a target of a few dozen job placements per year. Henry Street Settlement's target is closer to 500." He adds, however, that the relative value is roughly equivalent for all partners. "Somewhere around 10 percent of annual outcomes

## Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1965

**TARGET POPULATION:** Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities in New York City

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** Hospitality Careers Training Program; Fundamentals in Luxury Retail Training Program; BuildingWorks Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program; Adult Literacy Program; Career Center

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2007 (founding partner)



for the member organizations are added as a result of the Network. That's true for GOLES and Henry Street alike."

LESEN's monthly meetings represent an opportunity for liaisons to touch base and share information. At one recent meeting, for instance, Caro and representatives from four of the partner organizations reviewed a list of recently placed job applicants, discussed a general strategy for attracting new employer partners, and discussed specific leads they expected to pursue over the coming weeks.

These discussions have strengthened partner organizations in subtle ways. Caro relates the story of a job developer from one of the LESEN members who had been struggling to verify his placements. Upon mentioning this to a colleague from another LESEN member, he learned about an online resource that allows providers to enter a job applicant's Social Security number to confirm whether the person remains employed.

As the comfort level has risen among LESEN member organizations, the partnership has evolved. "It took some time to build trust and see transparency across funding, resources, outcomes and referrals," says Yanni Deconescu, a job developer at GOLES who serves as his organization's liaison for LESEN. "Because some of us were so new to this,

we had to get a better understanding of what each agency is after. Our common goal is to help everyone, and at the end of the day the client has a choice where they get the most value."

Indeed, the Network allows jobseekers to access a wider menu of options than they could at just one provider organization. "I had one student in our hospitality program during the day, who then went to Henry Street in the evening for an ESL job readiness workshop," says CPC's Annette Montalvo. Collaboration has fostered partner organizations' growth as well: for example, the hospitality program at CPC expanded from about 80 to 100 graduates a year as a result of working with LESEN.

It helps that, for the most part, LESEN partner organizations offer complementary workforce programs and have developed expertise serving different jobseeker groups. The Door offers a nationally recognized retail sector initiative, while Henry Street offers a program focused on hospitality careers. CPC also offers training focused on hotel housekeeping and hospitality careers, as well as its new Fundamentals in Luxury Retail initiative. CMP's programs are focused on healthcare and administrative careers. In terms of customers, The Door serves largely youth and young adults, CPC works mostly with Asian Americans, CMP serves mostly East Asian newcomers, and GOLES and Henry Street engage a varied population. As LESEN has matured, partners have found that their programs and value propositions are often complementary rather than competitive.

Perhaps the most prominent example of collaborative programming is the Bicycle Mechanics Skills Academy, a training co-developed by LESEN partner organizations. Led by Henry Street Settlement, this program enrolled 43 participants in early 2014 for an eight-week training on bicycle maintenance and repair. In addition to providing instruction on how to identify and fix problems with bicycles, the course included guidance on bicycle transport and redistribution (to help reduce landfill waste and provide bicycles to people who might not otherwise be able to afford one). Ultimately, 32 participants completed the course, of whom 24 were placed into jobs at an average hourly wage of \$11.67.

# Challenges

## The Door

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1972

**TARGET POPULATION:** New York City youth aged 12 to 24

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** This Way Ahead (nine-month job training and leadership program for participants aged 16 to 21 that culminates in the opportunity to interview for paid retail internships); Work Readiness Customer Service Program (training for unemployed participants aged 17 to 24 that provides customer service certification recognized by major retailers)

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2007 (founding partner)

As is often true with complex, multi-organizational collaborative models, LESEN has had to address and surmount challenges, both in terms of how partners interact within the Network and in terms of how the Network engages with employers. While the liaisons are all but unanimous in asserting that collaboration has increased as time has gone on, occasional frictions still arise.

“It’s a good model, but pieces still need to be worked out,” says Andrea Vaghy Benyola of The Door. “When you are referring people to be screened, that places another layer between you and the employer, and there can be tension. If a hotel has 14 housekeeper jobs and asks LESEN to send its three or four best candidates, and all of them come from The Door, the other partners will want to know why their candidates weren’t referred.”

Each partner organization’s unique operational systems and processes present another obstacle to navigate. Henry Street Settlement executive director David Garza cites the different “front ends” of each organization—for example, The Door’s emphasis on youth and their developmental needs, compared to the English-language focus of CPC or CMP. Gaspar Caro points to the more prosaic but significant fact that organizations use different data management systems, such as Salesforce, Outcomes, Excel, and Google Docs, to track their outcomes.

LESEN also represents a departure for partner organizations in its explicit demand-driven approach: the idea that the Network succeeds when it solves a problem for the employers with which it works. For staff members of provider organizations whose instincts are to advocate on behalf of their clients—many of whom have circumstances such as criminal records that might concern employers—this perspective does not come easily or naturally.

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## The idea that the Network succeeds when it solves a problem for employers represents a significant change in approach for LESEN member organizations.

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The mission of finding jobs for mostly lower-skilled candidates, including young adults, means that the majority of positions will be entry level and relatively low wage. By and large, LESEN has focused its efforts on hospitality, building maintenance and management, retail, and some professional administrative positions. Even so, it is sometimes the case that employers prefer candidates with relevant work experience—which can lead to frustration for an organization like The Door, whose younger clients cannot offer extensive work histories.

The varying receptivity of employers presents another concern. “One challenge with employers is their commitment to give access and hire locally,” says Yanni Deconescu of GOLES. “Some employers are unreceptive. Some are receptive in theory.” This reality tests the limits of the *good faith* approach that underscores LESEN’s strategy. “We’ve talked a lot about having formal commitments from employers, but it’s hard to commit them to give set percentages of jobs to our community.”



## GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side)

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1977

**TARGET POPULATION:** low-income residents of the Lower East Side

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** housing services and supports; tenant advocacy

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2007 (founding partner)

One partial exception is the memorandum of understanding that LESEN signed with the InterContinental Hotels Group, which committed to undertaking “best efforts” to achieve and maintain a goal of 30 percent of its staffing from the Lower East Side and East Village. As Community Board 3’s Susan Stetzer notes, one reason some employers are willing to codify this intention is their experience during and after Hurricane Sandy in 2012, when the difficulties of getting around New York City highlighted the value of having employees who live close to their place of work.

A final challenge—albeit one the partners warmly welcome—is how LESEN will scale up from its relatively modest level of operation to help fill the thousands of jobs projected to become available in the area over the next decade. Implicit in this question is where funding will come from to carry out this work.

“Let’s say LESEN could fill two thousand jobs at a unit cost of four thousand dollars per head,” says David Garza of Henry Street. “That’s eight million dollars of resources you’d need to effectively prepare candidates for work. The question is how you develop infrastructure for the longer term while fulfilling your obligations along the way and where is the overlap with existing resources.”

## Outcomes to Date and Next Steps

From March 2012 through mid-March 2015, LESEN engaged 107 employers, of whom 48 ultimately made hires. As a whole, LESEN candidates went on 668 job interviews and obtained 187 jobs, for an impressive interview-to-hire ratio of under four to one. Lower East Side residents made up 40 percent of all hires, and young adults (defined as age 25 or below) accounted for 47 percent of all hires. During this period, the average starting hourly wage was \$10.77; in 2015, it increased to \$11.52.

Most important, effective placements translate into enormous savings of time and money for employers by shortening the recruitment process and reducing subsequent turnover. Research by the Center for Law and Social Policy and the Center for Economic Policy Research has found that replacing even low-wage workers can cost thousands of dollars per employee, thanks to expenses related to advertising, recruiting, screening, and hiring and training a replacement.<sup>4</sup> Reducing these costs represents a significant value for LESEN’s employer partners.

Lee Isenstein, chief operating officer of Basketball City, an event space that hosts a range of activities (from corporate basketball to team-building exercises) and that rents courts by the hour, has hired about ten jobseekers through LESEN over the last three years. He praises the Network for its high-



## Grand Street Settlement

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1916

**TARGET POPULATION:** low-income families and individuals of the Lower East Side

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** ESL classes; senior and youth services; Community Technology Center

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2014

quality candidates. "I've given them parameters as far as what I was looking for in different positions," he says. "They sent over well-qualified candidates who fit those roles. That's saved me a lot of time and aggravation going through the hiring process, which is very valuable." Basketball City has hired LESEN participants for a range of administrative and maintenance positions, and some of these hires have since advanced into managerial roles.

Another local employer that has worked extensively with LESEN is Astor Wines & Spirits on the edge of the East Village. Front end manager Devanand Chanilal notes that the store has hired at least a dozen workers through the Network since 2012. "Most of the people we've hired through LESEN are from the Lower East Side, so they can get to work on time and come in if there's a sick call from someone else," Chanilal explains. He suggests that LESEN candidates stand out for their dependability and enthusiasm. "I don't hire everyone who

walks in. I want to feel confident that they're reliable, that they want to work and will be positive."

While LESEN has met or exceeded most of its goals to date, the scale of its operations is now set to dramatically increase. "The game is about to change," says Garza, citing a number of large development initiatives on the Lower East Side set to break ground in the near future. Among these are Essex Crossing, a 1.9-million-square-foot development featuring residential, commercial, and community space; the expansion of the South Street Seaport by the Howard Hughes Corporation; and Hotel Indigo, a project of the InterContinental Hotels Group, which will begin hiring in the summer of 2015. LESEN has signed memoranda of understanding with all three projects, giving partner organizations advance notice for selected job openings, which in turn should give LESEN candidates a leg up in the hiring process.

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**With multiple large developments on the Lower East Side ready to break ground, LESEN's operations are set to dramatically scale up. "The game is about to change," says David Garza.**

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"Thousands of additional jobs will be coming online by 2020," Garza adds. "In LESEN, we have a vehicle that employer partners see they can work with to fill many of those openings."

Annel Cabrera of L+M Development Partners, a firm that will play a key role in the Essex Crossing project and anticipates working with LESEN to fill jobs generated by the project, echoes this view. "Everyone you should be working with on the Lower East Side is a member of LESEN, and they have a great reputation. In terms of filling job vacancies, it's very convenient to work with one entity like that."

While specifics are yet to be finalized, L+M plans to work with vendors and contractors (during the construction phase) and tenants of the commercial space (once development is complete) to prioritize local hiring and ensure that neighborhood residents can access related employment. To that end, the memorandum of understanding between LESEN and the New York City Economic Development Corporation names LESEN as a key partner of Delancey Street Associates, an entity created by L+M and its Essex Crossing co-developers to manage activities and relationships for the project. Specifically, the memorandum names LESEN as the hiring source of choice among candidates for jobs from the Lower East Side community.

"We see LESEN helping to make sure community residents understand what the opportunities are and to prepare them to be viable competitive candidates for jobs," Cabrera says, citing LESEN's quarterly recruitment events and its job readiness and adult education services. With the project scheduled to roll out in stages over the next decade, Cabrera anticipates providing

training sessions for jobs that are scheduled to become available several years from now. On the construction side, this might include sustainability training and training for entry-level positions.

Notwithstanding the modest number of placements to date, LESEN partner organizations have audacious hopes for the Network's future development. "In five years, we would want to be the primary resource for hiring locally on the Lower East Side," says Yann Deconescu of GOLES. "Based on what we've already done over the last two years, I'm confident we will be."

## Lessons Learned

### Henry Street Settlement

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1893

**TARGET POPULATION:** low-income families and individuals of the Lower East Side

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** comprehensive social services, including healthcare, shelter and transitional housing, education, and arts; Workforce Development Center; ESL-Job Readiness Program; Jobs Plus; Youth Employment; Shelter Employment Services

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2007 (founding partner)

As LESEN gears up for significant expansion over the next several years, the model is already gaining attention as a potential template for replication within other communities. Policymakers, funders, and service providers should consider four takeaways that have contributed to the Network's success to date and the promise it holds for stronger results to come.

#### 1) The importance of committed leadership and staff

Everyone interviewed for this paper agreed that the addition of a full-time coordinator marked the turning point for LESEN. The Network would never have reached that point, however, without partner organizations' sustained commitment to keeping the prospect of collaboration on the table despite limited early results. Similarly, once the coordinator was in place, each partner's commitment to designating a single staff person as its LESEN liaison was vital. "We set it up that it has to be a designated person from each organization, not musical chairs," says David Garza of Henry Street. That the same faces appear at each monthly meeting provides additional motivation for ironing out issues when they arise.

#### 2) Building a common culture over time

From its initial utilitarian motivation—making sure that job orders from employer partners would not go unfilled for want

of capacity on the part of any one partner—LESEN has gradually expanded into a more comprehensive partnership. The collaborative Bicycle Mechanics Skills Academy represented one major step, as did the creation of common marketing and outreach materials, including a website ([www.lesemploymentnetwork.org](http://www.lesemploymentnetwork.org)) and a social media presence (@LES\_Employ). Most recently, in November 2014, the Network held its third major public recruitment event, which was coordinated by LESEN partner organizations, Community Board 3 district manager Susan Stetzer, local elected officials, and other stakeholders, and was attended by over 150 community residents. The Network plans to hold a similar event in the spring of 2015.

#### 3) Addressing challenges while remaining flexible

As this paper has detailed, LESEN has experienced its share of tensions and obstacles. Partner organizations' shared commitment to resolving issues (such as how the various organizations claim job placements against their respective contracts) as they arise has kept the collaboration on track and growing, with trust and transparency gradually increasing. At the same time, partner organizations and the Network as a whole have adjusted in response to

circumstances and as their level of shared comfort has risen. The coordinator, for instance, learned that providers are not generally able to produce strong candidates within 24 hours of a conversation with an employer; and partner organizations have proven increasingly willing to share best practices and internal resources. The liaisons are currently engaged in a round-robin series of visits to each organization to see for themselves what services are offered by each—and what might represent best fits for LESEN's clients.

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## LESEN partners' shared commitment to resolving issues as they arise has kept the collaboration on track and growing, with trust and transparency gradually increasing.

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### 4) The value of an intermediary

As an intermediary, JobsFirstNYC supports LESEN in a number of important ways beyond providing financial resources. Its engagement with local and national public and philanthropic funders helps raise LESEN's profile and increase awareness of its successes while providing guidance on the potential replication of this complex, multipartner model. JobsFirstNYC also provides technical assistance, advisement, and public policy supports to LESEN as a whole and to its individual member organizations. Finally, JobsFirstNYC's focus on demand-side strategies and employer engagement as necessary directions for the field helps LESEN expand its employer network by providing access to citywide resources and expertise and to regional and national employers currently or potentially doing business in the Lower East Side. The aggregate result is a strengthening of LESEN's impact as a vehicle for connecting and accelerating jobseekers' access to employment and for fostering systems change and the alignment of employers, workforce providers, policymakers, and local elected officials.

## The Road Ahead

In most respects, the full story of LESEN is yet to be told—and will depend in part on events beyond the control of the Network and its member organizations. Major development projects rarely proceed as quickly and smoothly as investors and public officials might hope: unexpected changes in financing arrangements or the political environment can upend even the most minutely crafted plans. Changes within the partner organizations, too, could affect the terms and extent of their engagement in the Network. But the core logic behind LESEN—a collective entity that serves its

community and its employer partners with greater capacity and higher quality than what its members can deliver on their own—remains tremendously compelling in its own right and of great potential value as a model for other workforce institutions and policymakers.

At the federal level, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 places new emphasis on collaboration between providers and deepens the workforce system's focus on demand-led strategies. LESEN offers a salutary example on both points. Its relevance is even stronger closer to home, as New York City considers how best to leverage intermediary structures in fulfilling the workforce reform vision articulated in the final report of Mayor de Blasio's Jobs for New Yorkers Task Force. As LESEN ramps up its efforts over the next several years, its successes could benefit not only jobseekers and employers but also a wide range of institutions and stakeholders invested in finding win-win workforce solutions.

### University Settlement Society of NY

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1892

**TARGET POPULATION:** low-income and recent immigrants in New York City

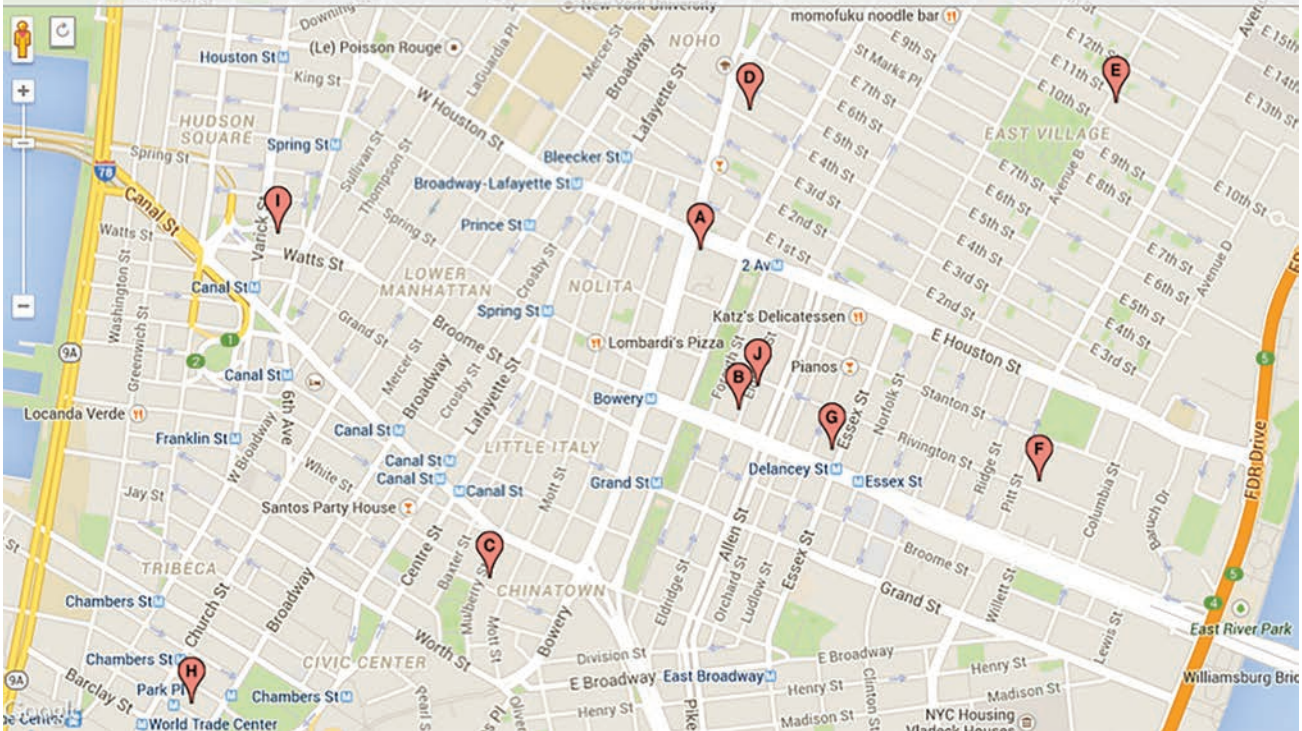
**SPECIAL PROGRAMS:** comprehensive social services

**YEAR JOINED LESEN:** 2007 (founding partner)

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, *State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods 2011*, p. 94 (2011).
- <sup>2</sup> Manhattan CD 3 Profile, New York City Department of City Planning. Online at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/mn3profile.pdf>; accessed Apr. 6, 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> James Parrott and Lazar Treschan, *Barriers to Entry: The Increasing Challenges Faced by Young Adults in the New York City Labor Market*, p. 23 (JobsFirstNYC, 2013).
- <sup>4</sup> Center for Economic and Policy Research, "How Much Does Employee Turnover Really Cost Your Business?" Online at [http://www.cepr.net/calculators/turnover\\_calc.html](http://www.cepr.net/calculators/turnover_calc.html); accessed Feb. 16, 2015.

## LESEN - Lower East Side Employment Network



### **A Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN)**

273 Bowery  
New York, NY 10002  
Email: [info@lesemploymentnetwork.org](mailto:info@lesemploymentnetwork.org)  
Phone Number: 646-465-5320

### **B Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)**

165 Eldridge Street, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10002  
Email: [info@cpc-nyc.org](mailto:info@cpc-nyc.org)  
Phone: 212-941-0041

### **C CMP**

70 Mulberry Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10013  
Email: [info@cmpny.org](mailto:info@cmpny.org)  
Phone: 212-571-1690

### **D Community Board No. 3**

59 East 4th Street  
New York, NY 10003  
Email: [info@cb3manhattan.org](mailto:info@cb3manhattan.org)  
Phone: 212-533-5300

### **E Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)**

171 Avenue B  
New York, NY 10002  
Email: [info@goles.org](mailto:info@goles.org)  
Phone: 212-533-2541

### **F Grand Street Settlement**

80 Pitt Street  
New York, NY 10002  
Email: [info@grandsettlement.org](mailto:info@grandsettlement.org)  
Phone: 212-674-1740

### **G Henry Street Settlement**

99 Essex Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10002  
Email: [info@henrystreet.org](mailto:info@henrystreet.org)  
Phone: 212-478-5400

### **H JobsFirstNYC**

11 Park Place, Suite 1602  
New York, NY 10007  
Email: [info@jobsfirstnyc.org](mailto:info@jobsfirstnyc.org)  
Phone: 646-738-5674

### **I The Door**

555 Broome Street  
New York, NY 10013  
Email: [info@door.org](mailto:info@door.org)  
Phone: 212-941-9090 x3368

### **J University Settlement Society of NY**

184 Eldridge Street  
New York, NY 10002  
Email: [info@universitysettlement.org](mailto:info@universitysettlement.org)  
Phone: 212-941-9090

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Greg Rideout, Deputy Program Officer for Youth Services & Workforce Development  
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Jeanie Tung, Director of Business Development



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Michael Zisser, Chief Executive Officer, University Settlement



## Lower East Side Employment Network

Gaspar Caro, LESEN Coordinator



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Andrea Vaghy-Benyola, Managing Director of Career and Education Services, The Door

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