Teens Advocate for a Just Future

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Investing in an Inspirational Collaboration

Jennifer and Jonathan Allan Soros were among a handful of lead donors to our NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund, which raised more than $110 million for grants (administered by The Trust) and no-interest loans (administered by Nonprofit Finance Fund) to help more than 700 nonprofits.

Jennifer: “When the pandemic began, we—like every single New Yorker—were terrified. We scrambled to ensure that our family, employees, and friends were well positioned for health and safety. We also quickly started looking for the most effective ways to help nonprofits that were providing care, financial support, and other services to New Yorkers who were struggling with COVID. It was overwhelming: as a person, a citizen, and as a funder to identify what organizations were able to provide immediate and meaningful assistance.

Jonathan: John MacIntosh of SeaChange Capital Partners and Darren Walker of the Ford Foundation told us about the NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund. It all came together really quickly, which was great. It was just a perfect solution.

On a good day there are huge numbers of New Yorkers living on the edge. The devastation caused by the virus made it clear that there were going to be even more people and organizations that needed help.

"...it was still eye-opening to see so many incredible organizations responding to the crisis in real time."

— Jennifer Allan Soros

Jennifer: The Trust’s ability to manage a complex request for proposals process that generated more than 1,600 applications was remarkable. The programmatic staff ensured that proposals were evaluated by consistent criteria to ensure an equitable distribution across the five boroughs.

We’ve always known there was a strong network of nonprofit service providers throughout the city, and we had previously supported many of them, but it was still eye-opening to see so many incredible organizations responding to the crisis in real time. It was very encouraging and gave me a deeper appreciation of how much of the city’s strength resides in these institutions. Just reading the grant applications was inspiring and humbling. I kept thinking: we need to do more, we need to do more, we need to do more.

Jonathan: We are very grateful for the opportunity to be connected to this work; to have a productive, thoughtful way to support our fellow New Yorkers during the pandemic.

Jennifer: For me as a donor it is very reassuring to know intimately how effective The Trust is. It was the established professionalism of The Trust that enabled us to invest effectively in the city during the pandemic. In the long term, it’s a valuable way for any donor to broadly support New York City and its residents."
In the face of COVID-19, efforts to “flatten the curve” have changed the way city nonprofits provide vital services and stay in business. Many had to shift gears and continue their work while dealing with dire circumstances and lost revenues. But even in good times, our vast nonprofit sector needs help with operations, including fundraising, building a diverse board and staff, and technological infrastructure.

A recent Trust partnership with Robin Hood and UJA-Federation of New York provided more than $500,000 for organizations helping other groups meet today’s unprecedented challenges.

Lawyers Alliance of New York is providing access to pro bono attorneys and staff so nonprofits can find answers to COVID-19 related questions regarding remote working, changing personnel policies, and more. As the pandemic strains finances, charities need assistance with questions about mergers, lease agreements, and changes to bylaws.

The Support Center for Nonprofit Management is sending experienced leaders to nonprofits to provide mentoring and coaching. It draws from a pool of former executives with many years of nonprofit management experience to help steer organizations through the various challenges of the crisis.

The partnership is also enlisting Cause Effective, Community Resource Exchange, OperationsInc, and Nonprofit Finance Fund.

“The Trust has always been committed to building the capacity of nonprofits so they can more fully achieve their goals,” said Patricia Swann, The Trust’s senior program officer overseeing this work. “The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly amplified this need. Most nonprofits function with low overhead. When a sudden crisis hits, they have very little flexibility in how they can spend money to respond. Our initiative with Robin Hood and UJA gives them free access to experts that can help them adapt their operations in response to the pandemic and its aftermath.”

NYC COUNTS: Community Resource Exchange is advising nonprofits, such as those promoting census participation, as they address the effects of the pandemic.
While police brutality has been the focus of recent protests and media coverage, the effects of systemic racism can be seen in all aspects of society. The Trust has addressed these injustices across a number of important fields.

CULTIVATING BLACK HOME OWNERSHIP

Owning a home is one of the most important ways to establish wealth and pass it to succeeding generations. However, for many low-income Black families, this staple of the American dream has been difficult. Grow Brooklyn has used a Trust grant to expand a multi-faceted program, called Protect Your Treasure, to build homeownership among Black families.

For families, one of the problems has been the complexity of navigating Surrogate’s Court, which handles the disposition of a deceased person’s assets. Because low-income heirs often cannot afford an attorney, they struggle with the proceedings and sometimes fall prey to scammers who deprive family members of the assets to which they are entitled.

Because of the life-threatening pandemic, there has been an increase in demand for Grow Brooklyn’s services, particularly for the execution of wills and health proxies, but the organization has had to move from in-person to virtual work. Protect Your Treasure now holds online workshops for seniors regarding the need for an end-of-life plan and works with them to develop one.

Additionally, it has been providing access to lawyers who can help with the probate and foreclosure process over the phone. To assist clients involved with Surrogate’s Court proceedings, it has been using an online filing system initiated because of the pandemic.

ADDRESSING THE LONG ISLAND WEALTH GAP

Since it was the fictional setting for the 1920s Gold Coast mansions of The Great Gatsby, Long Island has been popularly known for its wealthy residents, but racial segregation has exacerbated a widening wealth gap for many Black families. To help lift up these residents, our Long Island Community Foundation organized the Long Island Racial Equity Donor Collaborative Fund, a partnership of 12 banks and foundations, in 2018.

“The Long Island Community Foundation has a longstanding commitment to ensuring everyone here has access to the social and economic prosperity of the region, regardless of race or income,” said David Okorn, its executive director, citing its Erase Racism initiative that has addressed systemic inequities in housing, education, and public health for nearly 20 years.

The Collaborative hired the Urban Institute to create a plan to address financial inclusion, credit access, and financial stability among Long Island’s Black families. These issues were cited in studies by the New York Federal Reserve Bank and PolicyLink that were commissioned by the Collaborative.

The Urban Institute reviewed key drivers to promote wealth and Long Island’s nonprofit programs. The study identified the need to build capacity and coordinate the nonprofit sector, particularly in regard to employment; improve access to programs promoting financial security; and address the perception that Long Island was solely an enclave for wealthy white communities.
This spring, the Collaborative released a request for proposals to close the gap. It also awarded a grant to Prosperity Now, an organization with deep experience in advancing racial equity.

“The racial income gap in Long Island prevents the advancement of the economy as a whole,” said New York State Attorney General Letitia James. “I am proud to support the Collaborative’s efforts to promote policies that create opportunities for financial security for Black Long Islanders. Recognizing and addressing structural racism must be the first step in seeking economic justice.”

Lowering Maternal Morbidity Rates

Black women are eight times more likely to die during childbirth than white women in New York City. This tragic disparity in access to health care takes into account differences in wealth and education.

Research has begun to point to several contributing factors for the differences in morbidity rates: higher levels of stress and trauma among Black women, health-care provider biases, and the perceived power imbalance between medical professionals and patients.

Using a grant from The Trust, the Fund for Public Health in New York, a public-private partnership, is working with 14 public and private hospitals that are responsible for half of all Medicaid-funded births in the city. The grant is improving the hospitals’ data collection, promoting respectful maternity care, and helping staff recognize their own unconscious biases toward treating women of color. In the fall, it will train Birth Justice Defenders—peer educators to coach pregnant women on their health care rights. Because of the pandemic, the hospital implicit-bias trainings were moved online.

Promoting Educational Equity

New York’s public schools are highly segregated. High schools attended primarily by white and Asian students offer advanced coursework, college advising, and extracurricular activities, while schools serving mostly Black and Latinx students lack these offerings.

The Trust has given grants to two organizations working within their respective communities to advocate for educational equity.

Bell Voices is training students to fight for integrated schools and to participate in education policy discussions. Last year, its Teens Take Charge program created six policy recommendations that were adopted by the city, including the creation of a student General Assembly with representatives from every high school.

The group is pushing the city to provide low-performing schools with more college and career counselors, internship coordinators, test preparation classes, and student access to advanced coursework at other schools nearby.

After Mayor de Blasio proposed eliminating the entrance exam for the city’s specialized high schools, including Stuyvesant, Bronx High School of Science, and Brooklyn Tech, the ensuing controversy often pitted communities of color against each other.

The schools—renowned for academic achievement—have high percentages of white and Asian-American children and low percentages of Black and Latinx students. The sometimes heated debate was over whose children would gain access to this potential path to top colleges and lucrative careers, and whose children would be left out.

With a grant from The Trust, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families is working to help shape an inclusive educational policy that provides a quality education to all students. The Coalition will work with its constituent families so they can advocate for education reform and ways to improve the system. It also will organize meetings between Asian groups and representatives of other communities of color to promote mutual understanding.

Teens Take Charge:

(page 4) A member of Bell Voices speaks at a rally outside City Hall to save the Summer Youth Employment Program. Photo by Bell Voices student photographer Dulce Michelle

Inclusive Budgets:

Below, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families gathered with other organizations on Asian Pacific American City Advocacy Day to call for equity in the city’s budget.
This Summer’s Teen Job Challenge
Providing virtual internships to the next generation

For many New York City teens, landing a job through a publicly funded employment program is an important part of summer. But with the coronavirus raging through New York this spring and a budget deficit looming, the city initially proposed eliminating the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which typically provides jobs to tens of thousands of young people seeking to build skills and earn much-needed income.

“Young people in Black and Brown communities are already in a precarious position,” said Roderick Jenkins, The Trust’s senior program officer for youth and workforce development. “The pandemic has only exacerbated their vulnerability.”

A cadre of student activists and organizations that recognized the need for summer youth work successfully lobbied the city to reinstate a modified SYEP program. SYEP Summer Bridge is funding 35,000 paid virtual internships this summer, down from 75,000 minimum-wage jobs last year. Thanks to the foresight of Trust grantee ExpandED Schools, a system of online internship implementation and technical support is ready to go.

“It was important that we understand the unique position young people are in this summer,” said Saskia Traill, president and CEO of ExpandED. “They have suffered so many forms of loss this spring, whether personal or educational, and it was important that our educational programs adapt to that.”

In March, when the stay-at-home order was just enacted, but before SYEP was cancelled, ExpandED initiated conversations with more than 100 community organizations to develop core elements of a program that would provide young people with online career-oriented employment.

With $400,000 in funding from The Trust, ExpandED designed the Youth Empowerment Summer program to move programming online, develop content and support for providers, engage corporate mentors, and provide young people in low-income communities with technology support so they could fully participate in their Summer Bridge internship.

This July, teens had the opportunity to do internships with a range of nonprofit organizations in fields that include social justice, youth advocacy, wildlife management, music, and the arts.

“There have been a lot of speed bumps along the way,” continued Traill, “but now we can look towards helping young people build their professional skills over the summer, while also preparing them for the school year.”
Babou Gaye, a 17-year-old participant in the Trust-supported New York Civil Liberties Union Foundation’s Teen Activist Project, talks about his journey to becoming an advocate.

“My experience has shown me the extremes of a segregated school system. It starts with an elementary school upstate where I was one of very few Black students. In fifth grade, I moved with my mom to the Bronx, and ended up in the zoned middle school. It was the first time I went to school and everyone looked like me. But it was also a struggling school. We lacked resources from laptops to teachers.

My mom believes education is everything, so she wanted me to go to a specialized high school. My school counselor was very blunt. She said, “It’s going to be very hard for you because of the way you look and because of where you live. You are going to have to work twice as hard.” That whole summer I was at the library, printed out practice tests, and just studied. I took the test for the Bronx High School of Science and passed, but it was only a short-term victory. When I got there, I saw around six other black kids and I’m like, “Yeah, this is a problem.”

That’s when I knew the problem was systemic. Before that, I just knew that the people who looked like me were not doing as well as the people who didn’t look like me. It was kind of disheartening. It’s a lot to be 13 or 14 and feel like the whole world is stacked against you, preparing you to fail. I wanted to do something.

I heard about the Teen Activist Project at around 15 and saw a lot of cool opportunities—like being able to talk to elected officials. It looked like the gateway to making a difference and being an agent of change.

One thing I learned is anyone can be an activist. You don’t need to have this fancy vocabulary and know all the inside outs of the political system. You just need a message and a voice.

We went to Albany to lobby state officials. Doing just that and then being able to lead others in doing so was probably my most fulfilling experience as an activist.

The recent marches that followed the murder of George Floyd have been a rollercoaster for me. It’s really the culmination of the felt injustices. I think this one was able to reach more than the Black community because of how graphic it was. It flipped a switch in a lot of minds. People realized it’s not enough not to be a racist, you have to be anti-racist.

I always thought I was a science person, but in high school, I realized I wanted to be an advocate, whether that means being a lawyer, a political commentator, or running for office. I want to be able to influence policy and advocate for my community in whatever capacity I can.”
New York thanks you. We thank you.

As we saw the profound effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Trust quickly sent relief to struggling nonprofits to adapt their vital work and serve our communities in need. We’ll also be here to help the city recover and rebuild over the long term.

**OUR NEIGHBORS ARE IN NEED. YOUR GENEROSITY CAN HELP.**

Thank you to all those who have generously helped during the pandemic. Your gifts to our **Emergency Fund** support charities aiding New Yorkers facing the loss of income, food, shelter, and health care.

**HELP TODAY:** Give online at nycommunitytrust.org, contact Gay Young at gy@nyct-cfi.org, or use MyNYCT to make a contribution to the Emergency Fund.

**HELP TOMORROW:** Contact Marie D’Costa, (212) 686-2461 or md@nyct-cfi.org, about creating your own charitable legacy that withstands the test of time. You can also visit giveto.nyc.

“During this COVID-19 pandemic, we feel strongly that we should adjust our giving to match the moment. Giving through The Trust allows us to fuel the work of front-line nonprofits.”

- Stephen and Emily Cahnmann,
  Trust legacy donors and contributors to the Emergency Fund