

**NYCHA CHAIR JOHN B. RHEA
THE SETTLEMENT SUMMIT
ADDRESS: MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR: SERVICES THAT BUILD
STRONG COMMUNITIES
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2010 – 9:00 – 10:00 AM
NYU KIMMEL CENTER, 60 WASHINGTON SQUARE SOUTH**

Thank you, Nancy, for that very gracious introduction.

It is my pleasure to be with you this morning,

especially as we commemorate the 100th Anniversary

of the United Neighborhood Centers of America and

the 90th Anniversary of United Neighborhood Houses.

To both organizations: NYCHA wishes you a very

Happy Anniversary. To our friends from around the

globe: I'm very happy to be with you at your first U-N-

C-A Settlement Summit.

In 1992, recounting Nancy's service as a public

advocate and also as an official in Mayor David

Dinkins' Administration, the *New York Times* called

her both a "do-gooder" and a "crusader for the poor."

Since that profile was published, Nancy has done extraordinary good on behalf of underserved communities in New York City and across the nation, helping to influence and shape the conversation of how we as organizations and as a nation expand our shared definition of community and truly provide greater access to opportunity for all Americans.

Inclusion, Innovation, Impact

As I'm sure Nancy would agree, how we define community—its range, its reach, its depth—is informed by our principles and by our priorities. Are the children of public housing our children, or someone else's? Are the seniors in distressed neighborhoods our elders, or someone else's? Are the families who live in underserved communities our

neighbors, our fellow citizens, our partners in the struggle to renew the promise of a greater society...or not? These are serious questions. Our answers could not be more critical than they are right now, as our generation has, in the words of President Franklin Roosevelt, its “rendezvous with destiny.”

More than 70 years after President Roosevelt challenged the nation to continue along the road to recovery and prosperity *together*, President Barack Obama observed in his Inaugural Address, “The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity, on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart—not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.”

I know that you—the men and women of the Settlement House community who are doing the urgent and necessary work to revitalize the neighborhoods we serve—understand how critical collaboration is. How critical it is to broadening the definition of community and the scope of who our community embraces; how critical it is to transforming underserved communities until, finally, the term “underserved” fades from use; how critical it is to tapping the full potential of low-income neighborhoods and their residents and connecting those neighborhoods to surrounding communities and regional economies in ways that make both local and regional economic growth sustainable and equitable over the long term.

Under Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's leadership, I can proudly say that NYCHA is forging relationships with our colleagues in government and our non-profit and private sector partners that are so vital to ensuring that public housing is more than just a home—but that it is a force for real and lasting good in the lives of families. That commitment will continue. We are driven to create innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges public housing residents face every day. We also know that no one group has a monopoly on good solutions. And the only criteria we care about is: Will it work? Will it mean more of our children have a good education, especially early education and quality child care? Will it mean more low-income families have access to continuing education and workforce training and, ultimately,

stable jobs with livable wages? Will it improve the quality of life for our seniors? Will it lower costs? Will it improve service? Will it make neighborhoods stronger, safer, and more responsive to the needs of families?

This vision guides the work we do at NYCHA and it informs not only our partnerships with other organizations, but also our efforts to engage and empower our most important partner—NYCHA residents.

As you can imagine, the NYCHA neighborhood network is as diverse as it large. NYCHA serves more than 650-thousand New Yorkers. We are the largest public housing authority on the continent and were we an American city, we would rank 20th in terms of population size.

Consequently, our residents represent a beautiful patchwork quilt of cultures, ethnicities, languages and backgrounds. They are both young and old. One-third of our residents are younger than eighteen. One-third of our households are run by a senior citizen, many of whom are still in the parenting-business as they raise their grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

NYCHA families are, of course, low- to moderate-income, but that alone doesn't tell the full story.

Nearly 50 percent of NYCHA families are working families. And that number is growing...and we want to accelerate that growth.

As we develop the strategies that will help us secure public housing for the future, our planning must live

up to our mission—it must be resident-centered and family-focused.

More than Bricks and Mortar

We believe deeply that our mission must be about more than just our buildings and more inclusive than simply providing a quality home to our fellow New Yorkers. The buildings are vital, but it is the people who will ultimately transform a NYCHA building into a home and a NYCHA development into a community. Since its earliest days, the Authority has partnered with Union Settlement, Henry Street Settlement, United Neighborhood Houses and—Nancy’s former headquarters—the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association to support our residents with quality services ranging from comprehensive child care and

early childhood education to adult literacy and continuing education programs. By working together we have provided access to mental health services, support-services for our seniors, legal aid services, recreational opportunities, and workforce training and employment programs. All of which are essential to improving the quality of life for NYCHA residents and giving them a hand-up to a better life for themselves and their families.

At every step along our journey, we have learned from each other, refined and re-defined our approach while also broadening our reach. NYCHA is indebted to the Settlement House community for your foresight and your expertise. After all, you have been setting the standard for community-based services and grass-

roots organization for a generation longer than the Housing Authority has even been in existence.

As today's theme—Services that Build Strong Communities—suggests, the story we've written together is one of challenges, but also triumphs. It is a story of listening to the needs of the families we serve and developing community-minded solutions that assess where we are today, but also take careful analysis of trends and forecasts to plan for the long term. But the story is still being written.

And today, I want to share a few pages from the next chapter in NYCHA's continuing story.

Creating Strategies Today to Meet the Challenges of Tomorrow

Last May, I had the privilege and, indeed, the honor of becoming NYCHA's 21st Chairman. Among Mayor Bloomberg's charges to me and my team was improving and expanding our service to NYCHA residents.

Meeting the Mayor's charge required us to develop a comprehensive framework so that we could see, point-by-point, which areas we needed to target to not only improve service availability and delivery, but, ultimately, to improve the quality of life for families.

We outlined five areas: Early childhood and continuing education and enrichment; Economic opportunity and workforce training; Social Services—and here we wanted to make sure that we were not

simply delivering more services, but the right services; Enhanced housing and community facilities—which would allow us to reduce barriers to integration and better connect NYCHA neighborhoods to their surrounding communities; and Improved infrastructure and transportation—which is also about access.

Improving each area is vital to making public housing and their surrounding communities a vibrant force for good in the lives of New York families.

Collaboration is key. NYCHA does not receive financial support from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide the many services and programs that public housing families, as well as other low-income and senior residents who live near NYCHA neighborhoods, depend on. If we are going to

be able to improve how NYCHA delivers services—not to mention expand the range of services and programs we offer—we must continue to strengthen our existing coalitions, as well as identify new partners with whom we can enhance the level of service to New York families.

Our partnership with the Harlem Children’s Zone is an initiative of which I’m especially proud. Harlem Children’s Zone and their President and CEO Geoffrey Canada are hailed around the country for their work. President Obama has called Mr. Canada an education “pioneer.” In 2011, NYCHA and H-C-Z will create a new 13-hundred student charter school at the St. Nicholas Houses in an effort that will revitalize this west Harlem community and provide new educational opportunity for children, as well as jobs for NYCHA

residents. And this new H-C-Z facility will be available as a 24/7 community resource. This is exactly what President Obama had in mind when he proposed the Choice Neighborhood Initiative—partnering with the best, to bring the very best to existing, underserved low- and moderate-income communities.

Separately, we developed a comprehensive strategy to allow the Authority to raise capital from the private market to help close the gap between NYCHA's existing funding and what we truly require to secure public housing and the vital programs our residents rely on for the future. Last year, I created the Office of Public-Private Partnerships to forge new alliances to do just that.

The Office of Public-Private Partnerships is leading the way as NYCHA leverages the expertise of philanthropic, non-profit and private sector partners who are committed to preserving public housing and creating opportunity for NYCHA residents.

This year, we joined forces with the largest, most watched sports juggernaut in America—the National Football League—to launch the NFL-NYCHA Officiating Academy, a first-of-its-kind collaboration that trained thirty-one young men and three young women to be high school and junior athletic league referees. Several of our Academy’s top performers will be offered internships at NYCHA and at the NFL’s headquarters here in New York. And the NFL has committed to “creating an alumni network and

building the program” so that the graduates are supported as they climb the officiating ladder.

We are supporting fathers and their families with the NYCHA Fatherhood Initiative. As a member of the White House Fatherhood Initiative, I recognized that under-engaged and absent fathers is a national problem. NYCHA’s initiative builds upon our existing community center programs to increase father-child engagement through reading, science and life skills curricula tailored for children, teens and young fathers. At the same time, our Social Services team is helping to create a supportive network for fathers, fostering an environment where fathers will not only support their children, but also each other. NYCHA is taking concrete steps in New York City that will not only dramatically improve the lives of children in

public housing—and the fathers, as well—but will also serve as a model to help millions across the country.

We developed a strategy that placed economic empowerment for NYCHA residents at its core. I realized that more than just a part of the work we do, workforce training and economic empowerment was integral not only in the day-to-day lives of the people we serve, but also to our mission to preserve, strengthen and secure public housing for future generations. Economic empowerment improves families' quality of life and it boosts the overall health of NYCHA communities, because when a resident is employed in work that pays a good wage, he or she has a greater ability to care for their family—from providing better access to child care, to nutrition, to internet access.

Last year, I formed the Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability to focus on this goal. Among our many successes, NYCHA's new partnership with the Robin Hood Foundation, a proven difference maker in tackling poverty, is one of the most exciting. Just last week, NYCHA and Robin Hood launched a Training Academy that will prepare public housing residents citywide for a cross section of targeted jobs. We expect the Training Academy to be a multi-phase effort that will engage diverse funders, key stakeholders and both public and private sector partners.

At the same time, NYCHA is working to link neighborhood-based institutions, businesses and non-profit organizations with local public housing residents. When you look at a map of NYCHA

communities, you see that our developments are located on some of the most valuable real estate in all of New York. Take Amsterdam Houses on the Upper West Side, as one example. Amsterdam Houses are literally right across the street from a New York treasure—Lincoln Center. But, until now, there was no relationship between the Center and our residents. Together with Reynold Levy, the president of Lincoln Center, we have spearheaded the creation of the Lincoln Center Collaborative, which is composed of more than a dozen private, academic and non-profit organizations located in this historic New York district—including ABC-New York, Fordham University, and St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital—to create meaningful connections between the local public housing neighborhoods and the surrounding

communities with an initial focus on employment and career advancement.

Some examples of this partnership are internships at ABC-TV for NYCHA residents, free tickets to Lincoln Center cultural events and, most recently, during Fashion Week a panel discussion titled “A Life in Fashion,” that provided more than one-hundred-and-twenty interested NYCHA youth the opportunity to get an insider’s view of the fashion world...learning about different fashion careers—from designers to executives.

NYCHA is currently working with the Collaborative to quantify potential matches between local public housing residents’ skill sets and employer needs, as well as outline how we can bridge potential gaps between the two. We believe that the Lincoln Center

Collaborative will serve as a citywide model for the ways in which neighborhoods can come together.

Finally, working with the East River Development Alliance, United Way of New York City and the New York City Council, NYCHA is helping our residents gain valuable financial management skills while further strengthening the safety net for NYCHA families. Financial Independence Today, launched last Monday, is a major public-private partnership focused on fostering financial stability for public housing residents and helping residents who are facing economic hardship pay their rent by supporting them before they fall too far behind.

Serving the public housing residents of western Queens—the area with our highest number of working families—Financial Independence Today will provide

comprehensive financial counseling so that residents are better able to manage their household budgets, increase savings and move toward prosperity.

The work we do today will help ensure that the new foundation we've created has a multiplier effect to generate even greater returns for the future. That, in a nutshell, is why NYCHA cares so deeply about partnerships and forging coalitions with outcome driven organizations who know how to identify impediments to work and remove them; who have demonstrated expertise in outreach to target groups and providing literacy and adult education services; and who have a history of measurable results in getting low income people jobs with livable wages, reducing poverty and re-building communities.

Partners of Choice

If, after all I've said this morning, the message of how deeply NYCHA believes in partnership and collaboration to better provide existing services and, ultimately, to expand the range and reach of our service platform is not completely clear, let me say it again. Partnership is vital to improving the lives of the families who depend on the services Henry Street and Union Settlement and all the member organizations of United Neighborhood Centers of America provide; collaboration is critical to meeting the ever-evolving challenges of making our Cities and our societies fairer, more open, more transparent, and more just. Although NYCHA's strategy of collaboration is called Partners of Choice...working together is not a choice or a preference—it is a

fundamental necessity if we are to succeed in rebuilding our communities, block by block, home by home, person by person, family by family.

At NYCHA, Partners of Choice is about two groups who share common principles of service, economic justice and people-centered growth coming together, working together, and positively impacting people's lives. Then a third joins. And a fourth. And so on.

The circle expands, your influence deepens, and the number of lives and communities that are transformed multiplies.

We cannot do this work alone. But together, we can. Together, the limits can be tested and overcome; the challenges can be met and conquered. And even more important, by working together, not only will we

create solutions, but we will also empower families to be the owners of that journey.

Thank you very much.