

# WEATHERING THE STORM

## Rebuilding a More Resilient New York City Housing Authority Post-Sandy

### A REPORT BY

The Alliance for a Just Rebuilding  
ALIGN  
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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



The **Alliance for a Just Rebuilding** brings together labor unions, worker centers, and community, faith-based, environmental, and policy organizations to ensure that short-term recovery and long-term rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Sandy are just, equitable, and sustainable. AJR advocates for a recovery and rebuilding process that makes infrastructure and regulation more equitable, prioritizes transparency and community inclusion, creates new economic opportunity for all New Yorkers – particularly low-income communities and communities of color, – and includes a commitment to long-term climate sustainability and the elimination of environmental disparities across communities.



**Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center** (Research Partner) strengthens the impact of grassroots organizations in New York City's low-income and other excluded communities. CDP's Research and Policy Initiative partners with and provides strategic support to grassroots community organizations to build the power of their organizing and advocacy work.



**Community Voices Heard** (Project Coordinator) is a member-led multi-racial organization, principally women of color and low-income families in New York State that builds power to secure social, economic and racial justice for all. They accomplish this through grassroots organizing, leadership development, policy changes, and creating new models of direct democracy.



**Faith in New York** equips congregations and develop grassroots leaders to move significant public policy change that supports leaders' vision of a more just New York City with excellent public

schools, violence-free neighborhoods, access to good jobs, adequate and affordable health care, decent housing for all, and where people of all backgrounds can fully participate in economic and civic life.



**Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE)** is a Brooklyn-based multi-racial organization made up almost exclusively of women of color. FUREE organizes low-income families to build power to change the system so that all people's work is valued and all people have the right and economic means to decide and live out their own destinies.



**Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)** is a 35-year-old membership organization that serves the Lower East Side. They are dedicated to working on tenants' rights, homelessness prevention, economic security, and environmental and racial justice. They accomplish this through direct services, public education and training, community organizing, community-based research and leadership development.



**Red Hook Initiative (RHI)** believes that social change to overcome systemic inequities begins with empowered youth. In partnership with community adults, RHI nurtures young people in Red Hook to be inspired, resilient, and healthy, and to envision themselves as co-creators of their lives, community and society.



**New York Communities for Change** is a coalition of working families in low and moderate income communities fighting for social and economic justice throughout New York State.



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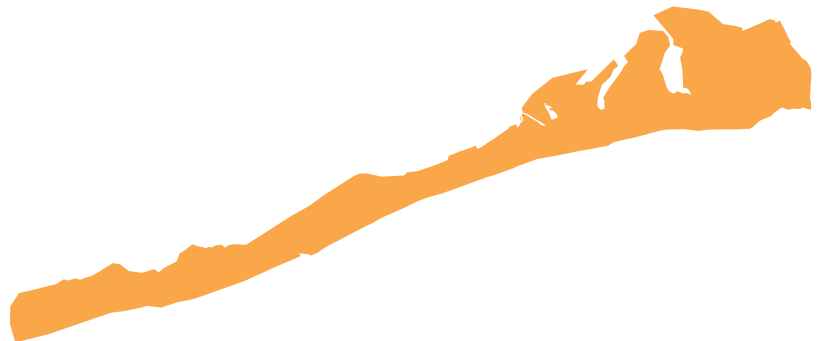
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City on October 29th, 2012, approximately 80,000 people residing in over 400 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings lost many essential services such as electricity, use of elevators, heat and hot water.<sup>1</sup>

The City's response to Hurricane Sandy was slow and communication to residents before, during and after the storm was inadequate. As a result, many community-based organizations stepped in to provide relief to residents in need. More than a year after Sandy, residents in hard hit areas across New York City still face serious problems related to the storm such as mold, elevator malfunction and rodent infestation.<sup>2</sup> 24 temporary boilers which remain in 16 developments<sup>3</sup> break down easily leaving residents with sporadic heat and hot water.<sup>4</sup> These problems were uncovered and exacerbated by Sandy but they are not new; policy choices and disinvestment over the last decade have caused NYCHA residents to live in an ongoing state of neglect.<sup>5</sup>

As an estimated \$3.2 billion federal dollars comes into New York City<sup>6</sup> for relief and resiliency efforts (including \$308 million for NYCHA) and NYCHA revamps its Hurricane Emergency Procedure, several community organizations across the City, in conjunction with the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, including Community Voices Heard, Good Old Lower East Side, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, Red Hook Initiative, Faith in NY and NY Communities for Change have come together with research support from the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center to assess how NYCHA residents living in storm-affected zones are faring and to develop solutions for how NYCHA and the City can address the issues exposed by Sandy.

## Research Findings

For this research, participating community groups surveyed public housing residents living in NYCHA buildings in Zone 1 (formerly Zone A) as well as a few heavily impacted buildings that were formerly in Zone B, collecting 597 surveys in total. Surveys were conducted in Coney Island, Lower East Side, Far Rockaway, Red Hook and Gowanus. The main findings include:

**1 Weak government response and poor communication with NYCHA residents created a gap that community groups filled.**

**2 NYCHA apartments, buildings and grounds are desperately in need of repairs. Sandy exacerbated existing repair needs in NYCHA buildings, many of which were already outstanding.**

**55%**

of survey respondents had repair needs in their apartment before Sandy

**40%**

had **new** repair needs as a result of Sandy

**62%**

were told they would have to wait 6 months or more to receive repairs

**3 Mold, a serious problem for NYCHA residents prior to Sandy, has gotten worse since the storm and is impacting the health of residents.**

**34%**

had visible mold in their apartment **prior** to Sandy

**45%**

have visible mold in their apartment **after** Sandy

Of those that have reported the mold problem

**34%**

said NYCHA cleaned up the mold poorly

**38%**

said NYCHA has done nothing

**56%**

of those with mold reported that the mold has affected their health.

**4 People in NYCHA need jobs. Although Sandy provided opportunities for employment and training for public housing residents, NYCHA did not take full advantage of this opportunity.**

**64%**

of those surveyed are not currently working

**84%**

have **NOT** been informed of job opportunities with NYCHA



## Recommendations

While this report reveals some of NYCHA's major challenges in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, these findings and the related recommendations come at an opportune moment for public housing residents in New York City. We are encouraged by the City's new leadership, including Mayor Bill de Blasio, NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and the new Chairs of two pertinent City Council Committees – Ritchie Torres, Chair of the Public Housing Committee and Mark Treyger, Chair of the Committee on Recovery and Resiliency. We are hopeful that these new leaders will learn from the past administration's mistakes and tackle these challenges head on. The additional resources coming into the City for rebuilding and resiliency post-Sandy and the revamping of NYCHA's Emergency Procedure allow our new leaders to set a higher standard and pilot initiatives that could have ripple effects across the broader NYCHA system. The following recommendations were developed by those on the ground who witness NYCHA's problems on a daily basis. We offer practical and effective solutions that will make NYCHA a better place to live for its 600,000 residents.

### Greater Communication and Coordination with Residents and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

- 1 NYCHA and the Office of Emergency Management must improve communication with NYCHA residents before, during and after a natural disaster and pay special attention to ensuring that seniors, people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency get the information that they need.**
- 2 NYCHA and OEM must improve coordination and communication with each other and with Community Based Organizations in Sandy-Affected Areas.**
- 3 NYCHA, the Mayor and the City Council should invest in creating vibrant community centers within NYCHA developments so that these can serve as community resources during natural disasters and beyond.**

### Tackling the Long-Term Mold Crisis and Addressing the Health and Safety of Residents

- 4 NYCHA must go beyond temporary, surface-level fixes for mold and address deeper infrastructure and chronic, uncontrolled moisture issues such as leaky roofs and old pipes.**

- 5 NYCHA should create a program modeled on Back Home, Back to Work (BHBW), piloted in Sandy's aftermath, to provide job training to public housing residents in how to conduct safe and healthy mold remediation.**

### Increasing Transparency and Accountability Measures to Improve and Expedite Repair Process

- 6 Each month, NYCHA should make public the list of outstanding repairs categorized by building or development and update it monthly.**
- 7 The City should create a Watch List for NYCHA properties, similar to the "NYC Worst Landlord List" (for private housing) and later the "NYCHA Watch List" set up by Mayor de Blasio while he was the Public Advocate. This will allow the public to know where the highest need exists and create public will to address the issues in these developments accordingly.**

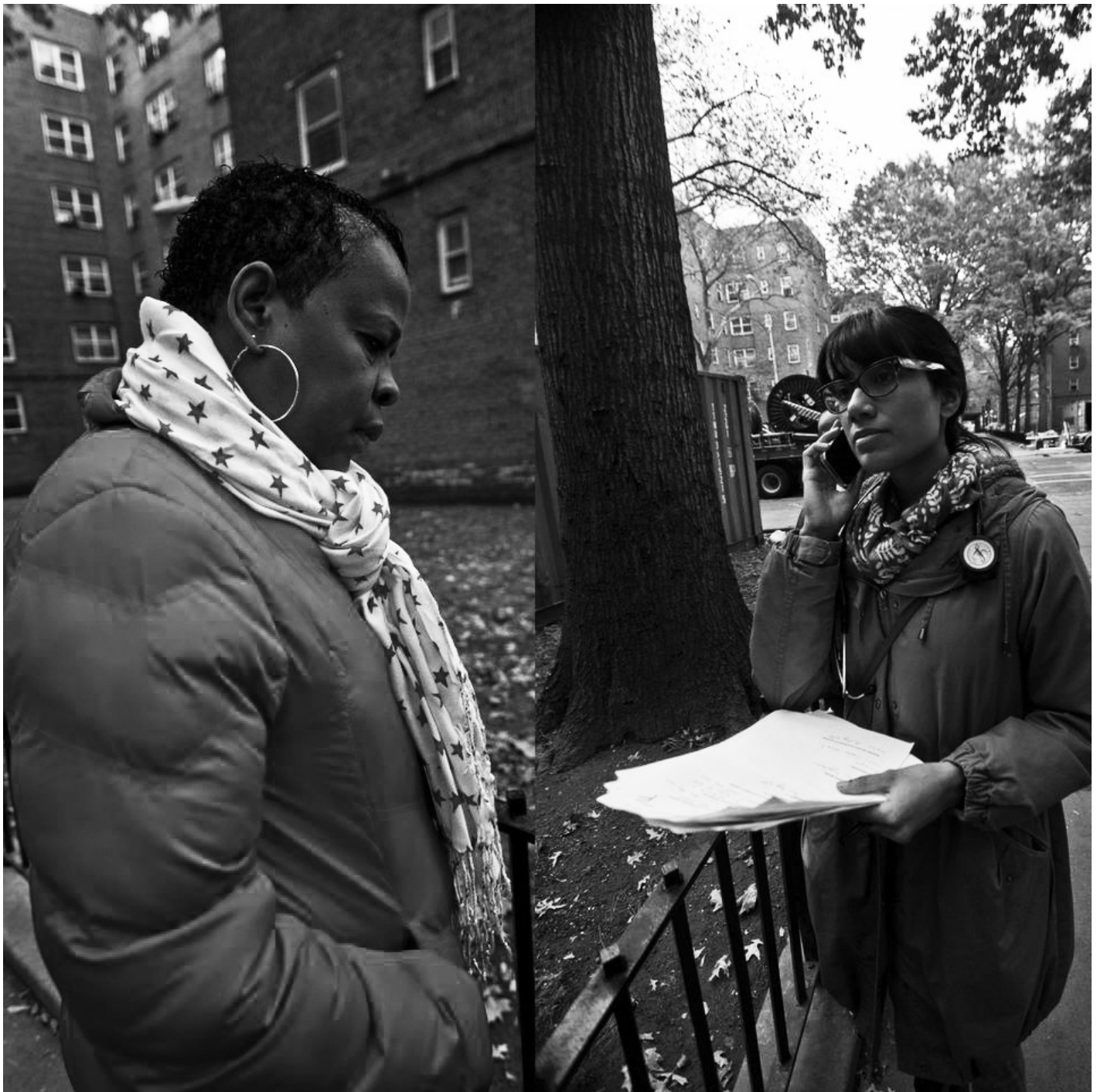
### Creating a Resilient Infrastructure for NYCHA

- 8 NYCHA should create more resilient infrastructure by installing Cogeneration (CHP) capacity in Zone I developments.**
- 9 NYCHA should replace temporary boilers and move all boilers and critical wiring systems of Zone I developments on to higher ground.**

### Increasing High-Quality Job Opportunities and Economic Resiliency for NYCHA Residents and Workers

- 10 NYCHA should ensure that more jobs go to residents, particularly jobs created with CDBG-DR funds coming to NYCHA for Sandy recovery.**
- 11 NYCHA should establish robust pre-apprenticeship programs and connect residents to them so that they can be trained and prepared for the apprenticeship slots and subsequent jobs that open up.**
- 12 NYCHA should ensure that more work is going to high quality union contractors through adopting job standard language for all Requests for Proposals and Requests for Qualifications.**





**RED HOOK**



# INTRODUCTION

When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City on October 29th, 2012, approximately 80,000 people residing in over 400 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings lost many essential services such as electricity, use of elevators, heat and hot water.<sup>7</sup> This was almost double the amount anticipated by NYCHA, who ordered the evacuation of 45,000 NYCHA residents living in 26 developments in Flood Zone A.<sup>8</sup> Even in those developments where evacuations were ordered, most residents decided to “shelter in place” due to various reasons such as health, lack of mobility, fear and not knowing where to go. In addition, some residents were not aware of evacuation orders because of communication lapses. Those that remained formed what the New York Times called, “a city within a city marked by acute need.”<sup>9</sup> For the next weeks and months, these New Yorkers endured deplorable conditions, living without heat, hot water, electricity, elevators and plumbing.

The City’s response to Hurricane Sandy was slow and communication to residents before, during and after the storm was inadequate.<sup>10</sup> As the New York Times reported, on November 8th, almost two weeks after the storm, residents of Red Hook Houses got notes that said “Since Hurricane Sandy, electricity will be out indefinitely.”<sup>11</sup> More recently, as temporary generators remain the main energy source in many buildings, information about a long-term plan continues to elude residents.

More than a year after Sandy, residents in hard hit areas across New York City still face serious problems related to the storm such as mold, elevator malfunction and rodent infestation.<sup>12</sup> 24 temporary boilers that remain in 16 developments<sup>13</sup> break down easily under extreme temperatures, causing residents to go without heat and hot water.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the storm exposed other structural problems such as high levels of unemployment and poverty, particularly amongst immigrants and people of color. These problems were uncovered and exacerbated by Sandy but they are not new; policy choices over the last decade have caused NYCHA residents to suffer from lack of repairs, mold, infestation and broken elevators.<sup>15</sup> In fact, in the month before Sandy hit, NYCHA had a backlog of 330,000 repairs.<sup>16</sup> Unable to access much of the Sandy-related aid made available to renters and homeowners, NYCHA residents must depend on the overburdened, under-resourced and historically mismanaged Housing Authority for repair services.

Now, over a year after the storm, as an estimated \$3.2 billion in federal dollars is allocated to the City<sup>17</sup> for relief and resiliency efforts, several community organizations across the City, in conjunction with the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, including Community Voices Heard, Good Old Lower East Side, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, Red Hook Initiative, Faith in NY and NY Communities for Change have come together with research support from the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center to assess how NYCHA residents living in storm-affected zones are faring and to develop solutions for how NYCHA and the City can address the issues exposed by Sandy.



**Overall, our research found:**

- 1 Weak government response and poor communication with NYCHA residents created a gap that community groups filled.**
- 2 NYCHA apartments, buildings and grounds are desperately in need of repairs. Sandy exacerbated existing repair needs in NYCHA buildings.**
- 3 Mold, a serious problem for NYCHA residents prior to Sandy, has gotten worse since the storm and is impacting the health of residents.**
- 4 People in NYCHA need jobs. Although Sandy recovery activities provided opportunities for employment and training for public housing residents, NYCHA did not take full advantage of these opportunities.**

These findings and the related recommendations come at an opportune moment for public housing residents in New York City. We have a set of promising new leaders including, Mayor Bill de Blasio, the City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who hails from the district with the highest concentration of public housing in NYC<sup>18</sup>, Shola Olatoye, the Chairperson at the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), and new Chairs of two key City Council Committees, Ritchie Torres for Public Housing<sup>19</sup> and Mark Treyger for Recovery and Resiliency<sup>20</sup>. In addition, NYCHA is in the midst of revising their Hurricane Emergency Procedure<sup>21</sup>, and \$308 million in funding for NYCHA, which is part of NYC's Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program funds (CDBG-DR, the main source of federal funds for redevelopment post-Sandy) is currently under an open comment period.<sup>22</sup> As the new administration inherits the recovery from the Bloomberg Administration, it has the ability to redress longstanding issues and move towards a more inclusive and equitable recovery. This new leadership can set a precedent for combating inequality in NYC by addressing the ongoing problems in NYCHA that were illuminated and exacerbated by Hurricane Sandy. We hope this report can provide a roadmap for the City's new leaders to use as they assess how to spend Sandy related funds, revise NYCHA's emergency plans, and consider broader NYCHA reforms.



## Hurricane Sandy's Impact on NYCHA by the Numbers<sup>23</sup>

**400+**

NYCHA buildings in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan were significantly affected by Sandy

**26**

Basements flooded

**34,564**

Apartments lost heat and/or hot water

**95**

Generators ruined

**80,000**

NYCHA residents who lost essential services

### Coney Island



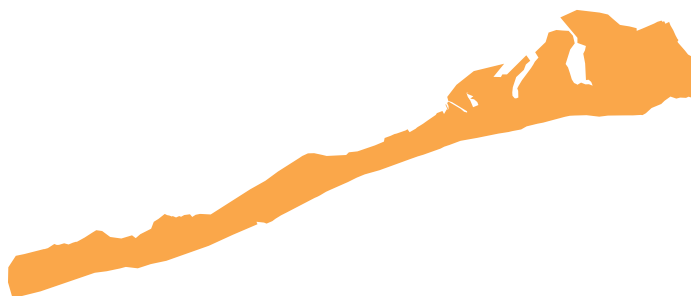
**42**

Buildings impacted

**8,882**

Residents affected

### The Rockaways



**60**

Buildings impacted

**10,100**

Residents affected

### Red Hook



**32**

Buildings impacted

**6,173**

Residents affected

### Manhattan



**176**

Buildings impacted

**41,513**

Residents affected



# METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the current conditions facing NYCHA residents that were impacted by Hurricane Sandy, several community-based organizations surveyed residents in NYCHA buildings located in Zone 1 (formerly Zone A) as well as a few heavily impacted buildings that were formerly in Zone B.<sup>24</sup> Researchers collected 597 surveys from the following neighborhoods: Coney Island (191 surveys), Lower East Side (93), Far Rockaway (113), Red Hook (139) and Gowanus (38).<sup>25</sup> Those neighborhoods were chosen because they all have concentrations of public housing developments, were in Hurricane Zones A or B at the time Hurricane Sandy hit, were severely impacted by Sandy, and are areas where the participating community groups are actively

working with NYCHA residents. Survey data was supplemented with profiles from each neighborhood as well as interviews with representatives from the Teamsters Local 237 and Laborers Local 78 unions, which both represent NYCHA workers. Researchers also reviewed reports, news coverage and documents from various public meetings about Hurricane Sandy and NYCHA. This is not intended to be a representative sample of public housing residents but rather offers an important snapshot of the public housing communities most impacted by Sandy. Additionally, this report offers a unique, on-the-ground perspective that is missing from many other studies about NYCHA and Hurricane Sandy.

## Neighborhoods Surveyed



## Demographics of Survey Respondents<sup>26</sup>

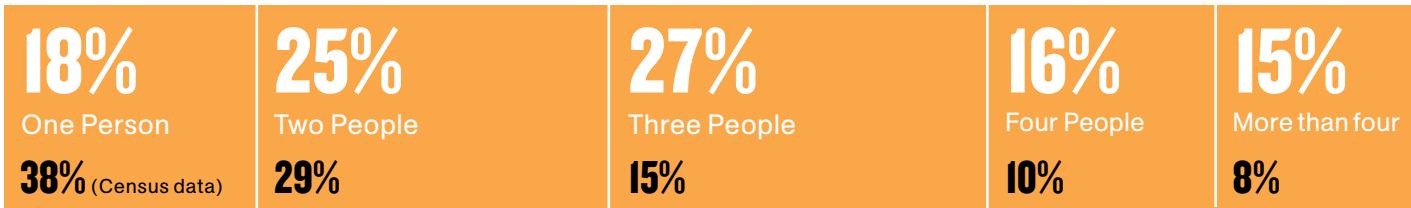
### Gender



### Race / Ethnicity



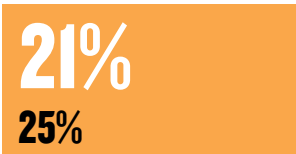
## Household Composition



### With youth in household<sup>27</sup>



### With elderly in household





# BACKGROUND

## NYCHA's Long-term Structural and Financial Challenges

### Estimated Deficit

**\$78,000,000**

NYCHA's estimated deficit for 2014

**\$13,400,000,000**

amount in estimated unmet capital needs over the next five years

Problems with NYCHA long preceded Hurricane Sandy: NYCHA's structural and financial problems are deep-rooted and long-standing, born out of the original conception and development of public housing and intensified by growing governmental neglect. Much of New York's public housing was built on flood zones, including those in Coney Island, the Lower East Side, Red Hook and the Rockaways, due to cheap procurement of such low-lying waterfront land.<sup>28</sup> According to a New York Times article by Jonathan Mahler, a combination of factors including "accident, grand vision and political expedience" put a concentration of public housing on the coastline and in harm's way.<sup>29</sup> The Housing Act of 1949 provided funding for new government subsidized housing and since poor people already lived near the waterfront, Robert Moses, the infamous New York City planner, wanted housing to be built where poor people already were.<sup>30</sup>

A long history of disinvestment in public housing by the federal government made public housing even more vulnerable—steep budget cuts to both operating and capital budgets have led to rampant disrepair and hazardous living conditions. Regularly, the public housing budgets fall short of industry leaders recommendations. For example, the Obama administration's proposed funding for Fiscal Year 2011 was \$706 million short of what the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association deemed sufficient.<sup>31</sup> As a result, NYCHA's deficit for fiscal year 2012 was \$77 million and the price tag for unmet needs close to \$6 billion.<sup>32,33</sup> This year, NYCHA estimates its deficit will be \$78 million<sup>34</sup> and unmet capital needs will more than double over the next five years to \$13.4 billion.<sup>35</sup> And even with operating and capital funding levels rising slightly for 2014 (8.5% for operating and 5.5% for capital, up from 2013 sequester levels), Public Housing makes up only 19% of the total HUD budget.<sup>36</sup> Even before Sandy wreaked havoc on public housing developments around the city,

NYCHA was seeking ways to cut back services as well as raise new revenue - raising rents, imposing fees, cutting employment services,<sup>37</sup> closing dozens of community centers, delaying critical repairs, and proposing the controversial land lease plan.<sup>38</sup>

## Persistent Financial and Management Challenges at NYCHA

On top of these budget woes, over the past several years, NYCHA has reportedly mismanaged much of the funding that they do have. In 2013, the Daily News reported that NYCHA had nearly \$1 billion in unspent federal dollars meant to rehab aging buildings, nearly half of which had not been touched for at least two years.<sup>39</sup> More recently, it was revealed that NYCHA has \$50 million in unspent City Funds that was set aside for projects such as upgrading community centers.<sup>40</sup> In addition, \$42 million has been earmarked for security cameras over the last eight years but has not been spent.<sup>41</sup> As a part of former Mayor Bloomberg's plan to reduce the repair backlog, NYCHA reports to have cut the backlog from 423,000<sup>42</sup> at the beginning of 2013 down to 106,000 at the beginning of 2014.<sup>43</sup> However, various media reports raised concerns that many post-Sandy work orders were closed without repairs being completed.<sup>44</sup> Residents echo these findings and report that cases are closed without any notice.<sup>45</sup>

## Following the Money: Expenses and Revenue for Sandy Related Costs

### Revenue

**\$3,219,000,000**

allocated to New York City from Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR), administered by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

### Expenditures

**\$1,800,000,000**

NYCHA's estimated costs for Sandy-related expenditures

This context of disinvestment and mismanagement was the backdrop when Hurricane Sandy hit. Compounding the pre-existing budget gap, NYCHA approximates \$1.8 billion in potential Sandy related



expenditures, including the cost of making permanent repairs, elevating infrastructure and constructing new utility buildings; mitigation measures, such as providing emergency backup power; and other advanced approaches to restoration, like the use of combined heat and power plants.<sup>46</sup> \$895 million is anticipated to be funded through existing programs, which leaves an unmet need of \$930 million.<sup>47</sup>

The Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR), administered by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is the main source of federal funds for post-Sandy housing redevelopment.

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#### Revenue: Federal Funding for NYCHA Post-Sandy

**\$308,000,000**

allocated to NYCHA from Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR)

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#### NYCHA's Proposed Expenses for Rehabilitation and Resiliency<sup>48</sup>

**\$417,000,000**

Resiliency (adding permanent emergency generators at critical buildings, improving electrical systems resiliency for damaged buildings and installation of watertight enclosures)

**\$120,000,000**

Enhancing 60 Community Centers in damaged buildings in Zone A to be warming centers, info distribution sites and local hubs during crises for damaged buildings

**\$50,000,000**

Increase resiliency of NYCHA Emergency Operations Center (damaged by Sandy)

**\$620,000,000**

Implement basic resiliency and mitigation measures (i.e. raising boilers and electrical switch gear) on non-damaged buildings

**\$60,000,000**

Enhance 30 community centers in non-damaged buildings in Zone A to act as local hubs

To date, NYC has been allocated \$3.219 billion from this program, including an initial allocation of \$1.77 billion in May 2013, and a second round of \$1.447 billion which is currently under a review period.<sup>48</sup> The City plans to spend its two rounds of CDBG money as follows: \$1.695 billion for housing programs, \$2.66 billion for business programs, \$855 million for infrastructure and other city services, \$234 million for resilience, and \$169 million for citywide administration and planning.<sup>49</sup>

Of the \$1.695 billion of CDBG-DR funds allocated to NYC for housing, NYCHA will get a total of \$308 million<sup>50</sup>, a figure that falls far short of the \$1.8 billion that they need for Sandy related expenditures.<sup>51</sup> In addition to CDBG-DR funds, NYCHA has received \$3.5 million from FEMA and \$123.6 million from its commercial and flood insurers<sup>52</sup> and could receive an additional \$440 million in insurance proceeds via the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and commercial insurance policies.<sup>53</sup> This money can only be used to cover the cost of property damage and cannot be used for resiliency and mitigation measures. In addition, insurance cannot be used to pay for boiler replacements, only repairs. While NYCHA is eligible for it, they have not yet received funding from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, which provides limited funding for mitigation activities to reduce disaster losses and protect life and property from future disaster.<sup>54</sup>

### What NYCHA and NYC Had in Place Before the Storm

Despite having a Hurricane Emergency Procedure that was updated four days before the storm<sup>55</sup> and an internal protocol established to respond to the storm, NYCHA's response and communication with residents before and during the storm was, residents report, largely inadequate. In fact, 28% of those surveyed for this report said that NYCHA did not provide them with information related to the storm. And of those that did receive information from NYCHA about the storm, 28% reported that this occurred after the storm had hit. During a City Council hearing on the topic, NYCHA's general manager Cecil House recognized that there was a "communication gap" with residents before and during the storm.<sup>56</sup>

### Needs of Residents after the Storm

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#### Residents that Applied for Government Relief

**56%**

of survey respondents applied for government relief

**47%**

of applicants did not receive government relief that they applied for



Following the storm, the needs of public housing residents were acute. Despite evacuation orders, many NYCHA residents decided to “shelter in place” due to various factors including mobility, health concerns, fear and others. NYCHA was not prepared for this alternative and as a result many people suffered for weeks without heat, hot water, electricity or working elevators. In fact, about 30% of survey respondents were without electricity, hot water, heat, or elevators for 3 weeks,

with some reporting that they were without those necessities for 12 weeks. Residents reported needing help with food, clothes, clean up support, apartment repairs, money, transportation, utilities and employment. In order to address their needs, 56% of survey respondents applied for government relief (FEMA, 79%; Food Stamps, 36%; Public Assistance 16.2%). However, almost half (47%) did not receive any government relief that they applied for.

## NYCHA Emergency Procedure

According to former NYCHA Chairperson John Rhea, NYCHA has had a Hurricane Emergency Procedure in place since 1964.<sup>57</sup> It was updated in 2012, right before the storm hit.

### NYCHA'S 2012 EMERGENCY PROCEDURE<sup>58</sup>

#### Includes:

- Master roster of all residents to track
  - Language spoken
  - Evacuation status
  - Disability status
- Number of residents in each apartment
- Name of evacuation shelter
- Current telephone number for residents
- A list of all residents registered as mobility impaired
- Resident-relations teams to provide information and assistance to all residents in the case of a hurricane
- Emergency supplies
- Staff emergency training and resident emergency training

NYCHA also had internal bodies to respond to emergencies (Emergency Services Department, Customer Contact Center and Family Services Unit), and reports on how to update buildings from lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and a 2011 review of NYCHA's emergency preparedness to Hurricane Irene.<sup>59</sup> NYCHA is currently in the process of updating its Emergency Procedure and last updated it in July 2013.

## Select Government Agencies and Their Roles During Sandy

### Office of Emergency Management (OEM)

OEM is a New York City government office that plans and prepares for emergencies, educates the public about preparedness, coordinates emergency response and recovery, and collects and disseminates emergency information.<sup>60</sup>

### Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA Coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror. FEMA is also where disaster survivors can apply for assistance.<sup>61</sup>

### Mayor's Office

During Hurricane Sandy and in the year following (the period which this report covers) the office of the Mayor was held by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. The following Mayoral offices participated in the Hurricane relief and recovery efforts: The Mayor's Office of Contract services, Data Analytics and Immigrant Affairs, amongst others. According to the Hurricane Sandy After Action Report and Recommendations, some of the roles that the Mayor's Office played during Sandy include: coordinated and released all storm-related information to the public via press conferences, social media, and other online sources; designated a 24-hour hotline in the Emergency Operations Center for elected officials to report constituent needs and other issues and coordinated partnerships with nonprofit organizations that deployed volunteers to canvas affected areas.<sup>62</sup>



# CITYWIDE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following research findings are a result of almost 600 surveys conducted in NYCHA developments in Zone 1 (formerly Zone A) and a few heavily impacted buildings that were formerly in Zone B. Surveys were conducted in the following neighborhoods: Coney Island, Gowanus, the Lower East Side, Red Hook and Far Rockaway. More detailed information on each neighborhood can be found in the “Neighborhood Impact and Response” section, starting on pg. 22.

## 1 Weak government response and poor communication with NYCHA residents created a gap that community groups filled.

In many communities impacted by Hurricane Sandy, there are long-standing, deep relationships with various community based organizations and NYCHA residents. These organizations provide a variety of services as well as community, advocacy and supports systems for and with NYCHA residents. When the storm hit, it was natural that many of these groups would become a part of the response. What these groups did not anticipate, however, is that they would become the primary driver of the relief effort in their communities. Due to the slow and inadequate government response to the needs of public housing residents, community groups were forced to take roles that exceeded their capacity and extended beyond their expertise. While many of these groups did an excellent job, they lacked coordination with government as well as the resources and technical expertise to meet the myriad of residents’ needs.

In his testimony before the City Council, Cecil House, NYCHA’s General Manager said that a major lesson learned from the Hurricane was that partnerships with Community Based Organizations are essential to resident engagement during and after a crisis.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, NYCHA has conducted several presentations to community groups since the storm, proposing improved coordination and communication with Community Based Organizations as well as a plan for using community centers as hubs for communication, staff training, crisis counseling and volunteer and supply coordination.<sup>64</sup> However, this recent focus on the importance of community centers is situated in the context of funding cuts and privatization for those centers and for community programming.<sup>65</sup> The following data indicates the importance that community groups played during and after the storm and continue to play today.

### Assistance Accessed After Storm

**59%**

of survey respondents accessed voluntary help/relief/assistance after the storm.

**Many survey respondents said they received assistance from a community center, a community organization, a tenant association or a religious institution.**

### How Respondents Accessed Information After the Storm

**73%**

Word of mouth

**31%**

Flyers

**31%**

Door knocking

### Community Groups that Provided Assistance or Relief

**CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities  
Community Voices Heard  
First Baptist Church  
Families United For Racial  
and Economic Equality  
Good Old Lower East Side  
Gowanus Community Center  
Graffiti Church  
Henry Street Settlement  
Miccio Community Center  
New York Communities For Change  
Project Hope  
Red Hook Initiative  
Sea Gate Association  
South Brooklyn Legal Services  
University Settlement  
Visitation Church**



## Disinvestment In NYCHA Community Operations, Including Community Centers

**\$86,024,000<sup>66</sup>**

Fiscal Year  
**2008**

**\$66,804,000<sup>67</sup>**

Fiscal Year  
**2009**

**\$59,477,000<sup>68</sup>**

Fiscal Year  
**2010**

**\$69,117,000<sup>69</sup>**

Fiscal Year  
**2011**

**\$53,096,000<sup>70</sup>**

Fiscal Year  
**2012**

**\$53,377,000<sup>71</sup>**

Fiscal Year  
**2013**

## The Importance of NYCHA Community Centers

The Gowanus Community Center once served as a general point of contact for all tenants, providing a broad range of personal development resources and workshops. It also was the primary outlet for strengthening the community through collaboration and celebration with other civic and cultural organizations. But for years, the Community Center has been mostly vacant and closed to the thousands of low-income families in the Gowanus Houses.

In the aftermath of Sandy, the community center's doors were opened and it became an ad-hoc relief hub for public housing residents impacted by the storm after overflow from the Gowanus Canal flooded five large buildings in the development. Residents without electricity, heat and hot water flocked to the Center daily for hot meals, blankets, warm clothes, food, diapers, to charge cell phones, speak with health care and social work professionals and to check in on their neighbors. With very little support from NYCHA and established relief agencies, Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE) coordinated hundreds of residents and volunteers to take donations, prepare meals, refill prescriptions, and canvas buildings to ensure basic needs were met. Without access to the Center, much of this essential post-Sandy work would have been impossible to do.

While budget cuts have resulted in the closure of many community centers in NYCHA developments across the city, FUREE has been working with tenant leaders to fully re-open the Gowanus Community Center. The center could potentially serve as a well-organized relief hub in the event of another disaster and as a way to support social resiliency with regular after school programming and other services and activities for residents, especially in the most at-risk neighborhoods.



**GOWANUS**



## Community Response to Hurricane Sandy



### RED HOOK

#### Red Hook

On October 30, 2012, Hurricane Sandy left thousands of residents of the NYCHA Red Hook Houses without electricity, heat, or running water, but left the Red Hook Initiative (RHI) center unharmed. RHI staff and participants did what they had done every day for the last 10 years—they organized and took action to respond to the needs of their own community. They were quickly joined in their efforts by a flood of support from thousands of volunteers, community agencies, elected officials, corporations, and donors. The Red Hook Initiative's doors were open 12 to 14 hours per day for 24 consecutive days. At the peak of the crisis, over 1,200 people came through the Red Hook Initiative doors to charge phones, get a hot meal, pick up supplies, get updated information, receive medical or legal support, and offer to help. Many of these individuals had never been to RHI before the storm, but found a place where they felt cared for and where their needs were met. In the time since the storm, RHI has continued to respond to the changing needs of the community in the wake of the disaster.

#### Lower East Side Long Term Recovery Group and Community Based Disaster Plan: *LES Ready*

Hurricane Sandy highlighted major gaps in the city's disaster preparedness and response plans and the critical need for community input into the City's disaster planning. To address this, Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRG) have been established in affected areas around New York City. One example of a particularly robust LTRG is *LES Ready* in the Lower East Side. This "coalition of community groups and institutions" has been coordinated in part by the Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES) and has a mission to "cooperatively coordinate our response, resources, and preparedness planning and training in response to Hurricane Sandy and in the event of future disasters."<sup>72</sup> Working closely with local officials, faith-based institutions and other community-based organizations, GOLES and *LES Ready* are conducting participatory research and developing a community-based disaster preparedness plan that will ensure that the community is able to handle natural disasters in the future in a more coordinated fashion and with more direct input from community residents.



## 2 NYCHA apartments, buildings and grounds are desperately in need of repairs. Sandy exacerbated existing repair needs in NYCHA buildings, many of which were already outstanding.

The urgent need for repairs in NYCHA buildings and apartments is not new. In the month prior to Sandy, there was a backlog of 330,000 repairs.<sup>73</sup> For years, NYCHA residents have complained of malfunctioning elevators, mold and broken appliances. While federal disinvestment has played a role in the slow and inconsistent response to repair needs, it does not tell the whole story. NYCHA reports to have reduced their number of open work orders from 423,000<sup>74</sup> at the beginning of 2013 down to 106,000 at the beginning of 2014 as a part of former Mayor Bloomberg's "comprehensive action plan to virtually eliminate the entire backlog by years end (2013)."<sup>75</sup> However, a recent article in the Daily News raised concerns that many post-Sandy work orders have closed without repairs being completed: "NYCHA workers speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of being fired told The News the campaign to eliminate the backlog has been a sham. In an effort to reduce the numbers, they said, repair "tickets" were simply cancelled and counted as closed when the new initiative kicked off at the beginning of the year."<sup>76</sup> Residents echo these findings and report that cases are closed without any notice.<sup>77</sup>

The following survey data shows the repairs crisis both before and after the storm

**55%**

of survey respondents had repair needs in their apartment before Sandy

**40%**

had new repair needs as a result of Sandy;

**31%**

had their apartments flood or leak because of Sandy

**62%**

were told they would have to wait 6 months or more to receive repairs

**78%**

say NYCHA has not been quicker to take care of repair issues post-Sandy

**82%**

have not noticed a change in how quickly repairs are addressed since the effort to eliminate NYCHA's backlog of repairs

## Top Repair Needs BEFORE and AFTER Sandy

### Top APARTMENT repair needs

#### BEFORE SANDY

Painting/Plaster  
Mold  
Bathroom  
Appliance  
Leaks

#### AFTER SANDY

Mold  
Painting  
Leaks  
Walls

### Top BUILDING repair needs

#### BEFORE SANDY

Elevators  
Cleaning needs  
Painting  
Leaks  
Walls

#### AFTER SANDY

Elevators  
Roof  
Pests  
Paint  
Mold

### Top GROUNDS repair needs

#### BEFORE SANDY

Cleaning needs  
Pests  
Waste  
Playground/  
park repairs  
Lights

#### AFTER SANDY

Mold  
Cleaning needs,  
trees  
Pests  
Playground/  
park repairs

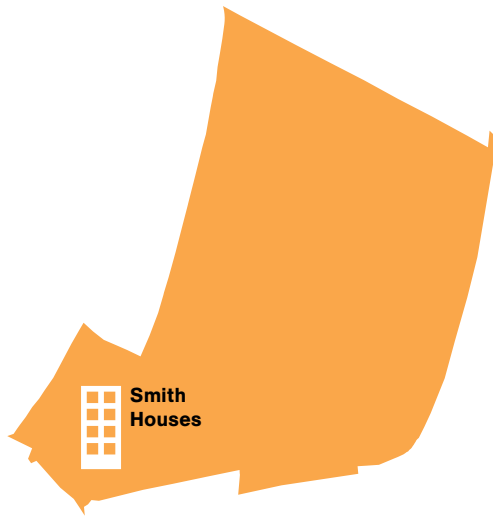
### Temporary Boilers Still Remain

**24**

mobile boilers are still in place in 16 developments. These easily break down causing ongoing problems with heat and hot water.<sup>78</sup>



## Resident Profile: Marlene Gardenhire, Smith Houses LOWER EAST SIDE



Marlene Gardenhire has been a resident of NYCHA's Alfred. E. Smith Houses for over 31 years. Before Hurricane Sandy she lived on the 13th floor at 10 Catherine Slip with her two children. Even before the storm Marlene's apartment had mold and heating issues. When Sandy hit, Marlene and her family evacuated to a relative's house. They returned three days later to a flooded apartment. All of the floor tiles were warped and damaged, the mold had worsened in all rooms, the kitchen cabinets were infested with roaches and the walls in the entire apartment began to crumble. After returning to live in these horrifying conditions, Marlene's 5 year old son (at the time) who suffers from chronic asthma, had to be rushed to the hospital and was diagnosed with pneumonia. The doctors say it was caused by her living conditions. After living with these post-Sandy conditions for a whole year, Marlene and her family were finally relocated to another apartment in the Smith Houses development but only after a lawsuit was filed by the Urban Justice Center.





## Resident Profile: Jherelle Benn, Red Hook Houses RED HOOK



### Temporary Generators and Boilers

**“After Hurricane Sandy, Red Hook Houses went without power for at least five days because our basement flooded and the boilers and generators were located in the basement. Eventually, temporary boilers were installed, which we still have today.**

**Red Hook residents did get jobs helping to clean out the basements that were damaged, but some were not trained right and may have been exposed to hazardous materials. I understand that when Red Hook was built it was constructed to have the**

**generators and boilers in the basement, but I think that should have been reevaluated once that they knew that Red Hook is in a flood zone. I also think that once they knew we were in the direct impact zone the temporary generators or boilers should have been installed, to prevent the long wait for the return of heat and hot water. It was also sad that one year after Sandy most buildings still have temporary generators and boilers.**

**Now that NYCHA knows that Red Hook will flood in a storm, they should work on developing a plan to put the generators or boilers some place that will not flood. This may mean placing them on the roof if possible or maybe building a structure similar to the trailer structure they are currently using to host the temporary ones. I also think that they should train and hire Red Hook residents to assist with this.**

**NYCHA has the opportunity to really help Red Hook before we are hit with another Sandy. They have a way to actively prevent the loss of power, heat and hot water if they act on what they have learned from Sandy. I hope we don't have to wait another year before we see these changes.”**





### 3 Mold, a serious problem for NYCHA residents prior to Sandy, has gotten worse since the storm and is impacting the health of residents.

Since Hurricane Sandy, mold has been a widely reported problem for many homes in affected areas and has had a disproportionate impact on low-income and immigrant communities.<sup>79</sup> The City has developed some mold remediation programs such as the Neighborhood Revitalization NYC program and the groups involved in this study have worked with the City to expand and improve their mold remediation efforts. However, as cited in an earlier report by the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, “the acute need for mold remediation across New York has not abated, and mold’s disproportionate impact on low-income and immigrant communities has resulted in displacement, sickness, and continued crisis in Sandy-affected neighborhoods.”<sup>80</sup>

For NYCHA residents who have been struggling for years with untreated mold, the problem only became worse when Sandy caused flooding in apartments. A recent story by Dateline NBC stated that public housing has three times as many leaks as private housing—a problem that causes mold—and has almost four times as many roach infestations. These conditions both lead to asthma and exacerbate it.<sup>81</sup> Rather than eradicate the fundamental problem of uncontrolled moisture in NYCHA buildings and apartments, Dateline NBC revealed, NYCHA often makes cosmetic repairs, such as painting over the mold, which does not get at the root of the problem.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, oftentimes NYCHA workers are not properly trained to remove mold and are not given the proper safety equipment.<sup>83</sup>

While NYCHA reports to have knocked on the doors of 24,000 units to inspect for mold as well as cleaned mold from more than 5,400 of those units post-Sandy<sup>84</sup>, mold has been such a widespread problem for so long that NYCHA recently signed a settlement agreeing to judicial oversight of NYCHA’s compliance with mold clean-up for the next three years.<sup>85</sup> The Baez settlement was reached as part of a lawsuit filed by the National Center for Law and Economic Justice and Natural Resources Defense Council on behalf of a class of residents with asthma that alleges that NYCHA has violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by not eradicating mold from apartments where tenants with asthma live.<sup>86</sup> As part of the agreement, NYCHA said that it will no longer just paint over mold, but will “repair underlying problems such as leaky pipes that spawn mold.”<sup>87</sup> The settlement also creates several new monitoring tools and imposes strict deadlines for completion of repairs.

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The following survey data points to a serious mold problem in NYCHA buildings across the city

**34%**

of survey respondents had visible mold in their apartment prior to Sandy

**45%**

have visible mold in their apartment after Sandy

**19%**

of survey respondents had new mold after Sandy

**29%**

of those without mold before Sandy had mold after Sandy

**88%**

said they reported the mold problem

**Of those 88%**

**81%**

reported the problem to NYCHA

**24%**

called 311

**Of those who have reported the problem**

**34%**

said NYCHA cleaned up the mold poorly

**38%**

said NYCHA has done nothing

**56%**

reported that the mold has affected their health. Health issues include asthma, bronchitis, coughing allergies and breathing

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**Compared to private housing, public housing has**

**3x**

as many leaks

**4x**

as many roach infestations

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## Resident Profile: Jose Maldonado, Gravesend Houses CONEY ISLAND



**“The mold situation in my apartment started before Sandy hit. It started in my closet area and moved up the wall to the ceiling. I submitted a ticket to NYCHA and they came out to fix the mold. But all they did was paint over it.**

**After Sandy, the mold grew faster and seemed to be the worst on days that we were without heat for a long amount of time, which was sometimes three or more days. It spread to cover the ceiling throughout the house, into my closet and all over my clothes. It was so bad that I lost all of my clothes. In my kids’**

**room it had worked its way down the walls and I had to remove furniture and mattresses. Again, I put in a ticket to NYCHA to remove the mold and when they did remove it, they used a chemical that had a strong bleach smell that I don’t think was safe.**

**I also have leaks throughout the bathroom that have led to mold. After having NYCHA come out for the leak they explained that the roof is very bad and they have seen mold develop in a number of apartments because of the roof. And when the house is damp for several days, the mold spreads more. As of now, mold still covers my ceiling throughout the apartment and has moved down the wall on to the window.**

**I think with the money that is coming to deal with Sandy issues, fixing the roofs will help with leaks and hopefully with the mold issues. I think they should hire and properly train residents in the developments directly affected by the mold issues to help clear the mold as well as fix the overall problem.”**



Photo: Rachel Falcone



#### 4 People in NYCHA need jobs. Although Sandy provided opportunities for employment and training for public housing residents, NYCHA did not take full advantage of this opportunity.

The unemployment rate in New York City as of December 2013 was 7.5%, this figure jumps to 13.1% for African American and 9.1% for Latinos<sup>88</sup>, who face structural and historical barriers to employment. For public housing residents, unemployment is particularly severe. Fifty-six percent of all working age residents in NYCHA do not report income from employment.<sup>89</sup> And the problem is getting worse, the unemployment rate for public housing residents nearly tripled from 2008 to 2010.<sup>90</sup>

Section 3, a federal regulation, stipulates that a portion of all HUD funds used for repairs to public housing be set-aside to create jobs for residents of public housing or those in metropolitan areas making less than 80 percent of the area median income.<sup>91</sup> However, as outlined in “Bad Arithmetic,” a 2010 report by Community Voices Heard, very few residents know about this regulation and very few jobs are actually created for NYCHA residents.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, though Section 3 stipulates that residents should have been hired to help with Sandy related repair work, very few of those that we surveyed were informed of job opportunities through NYCHA, even though new jobs were created. As more funding comes into the City for public housing repairs, NYCHA residents, who are in severe need of work, should be prioritized for any new jobs that are created as part of recovery and resiliency efforts.

##### Data from our survey shows

**64%**

of those surveyed are not currently working

**12%**

lost work because of the hurricane

**84%**

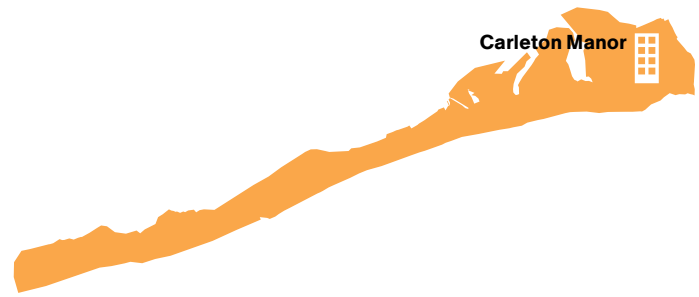
have NOT been informed of job opportunities with NYCHA

##### Unemployment Amongst NYCHA Residents

**56%**

working age NYCHA residents do not report income from employment

#### Resident Profile: Vanessa Robinson, Carleton Manor FAR ROCKAWAY



**“When I think of the job situation here in Far Rockaway it was difficult to get a job prior to Hurricane Sandy, but after the storm it seemed almost impossible for a large number of folks.”**

Vanessa, a resident of the Carleton Manor NYCHA development in The Rockaways, saw residents of Far Rockaway wait in extremely long lines for the possibility of getting a job with the Sandy clean up, but says that many of these positions ultimately went to people that do not live in the neighborhood.

She saw a parallel problem with positions for NYCHA jobs: some positions went to NYCHA residents but more went to applicants who do not live in NYCHA. This left an alarming amount of NYCHA residents at a disadvantage for getting those opportunities. Another issue was that residents who did receive jobs were not properly trained. To many it felt as though NYCHA just wanted to get the work done without any regard for the worker. For Vanessa, and many other NYCHA residents, this is not enough. To create sustainable employment for NYCHA residents in The Rockaways, Vanessa believes that the following need to be set in place: resources should be set aside for training and barriers to employment; jobs should be diverse; age limits should be increased to get older residents working; and financial assistance should be made available since some residents no longer are receiving unemployment benefits.



## Perspective of Labor Unions that Work in NYCHA



The Teamsters and Laborers are two unions that have long had members working on and living in NYCHA buildings. Researchers spoke with representatives from Teamsters Local 237 and Laborers Eastern Region Organizing Fund to understand the role their members played post-Hurricane Sandy. The Teamsters represents 7,200 NYCHA workers including property managers, superintendents, maintenance, janitorial, groundskeepers and some trades. The Laborers used to do extensive large-scale repair work in NYCHA, but in the last two years the agency has moved away from using union labor. They are currently negotiating a Project Labor Agreement that would make all work going forward go to union labor.

### Training and Safety Equipment

Right after Hurricane Sandy, there was considerable debris, sand, and garbage washed into basements and through first floors. At first the Teamsters were assisting in the removal of debris as it was seen as part of their groundwork maintenance responsibilities. NYCHA did not provide the necessary equipment and safety training to keep workers safe while doing this often toxic and dangerous work. Thus, the union refused to allow its workers to participate and NYCHA ended up hiring outside contractors to complete the work.

Hurricane Sandy damaged buildings' infrastructure including destroying boilers and many trash compactors. Teamsters and other grounds workers had to remove all the piled up trash in shoots, often emitting noxious smells several stories up, by hand. Additionally, their equipment, tools, and uniforms were stored in NYCHA buildings basements and so destroyed by Sandy. This left workers manually removing garbage with inadequate gloves and without their winter uniforms.

Another large issue was mold, which existed in NYCHA residences long before the storm made landfall. Hurricane Sandy brought this issue to the forefront. Mold is difficult to treat and there are a lot of misconceptions about how it can be remediated. The few trainings provided to workers advocated techniques that are not the recommended way to get rid mold (i.e. using bleach) or are hazardous for both the workers and residents health (i.e. known carcinogenic cleaning supplies). Again, it took considerable advocacy and pushing from the Teamsters Union to get their members properly trained and given the necessary safety equipment to remediate mold.

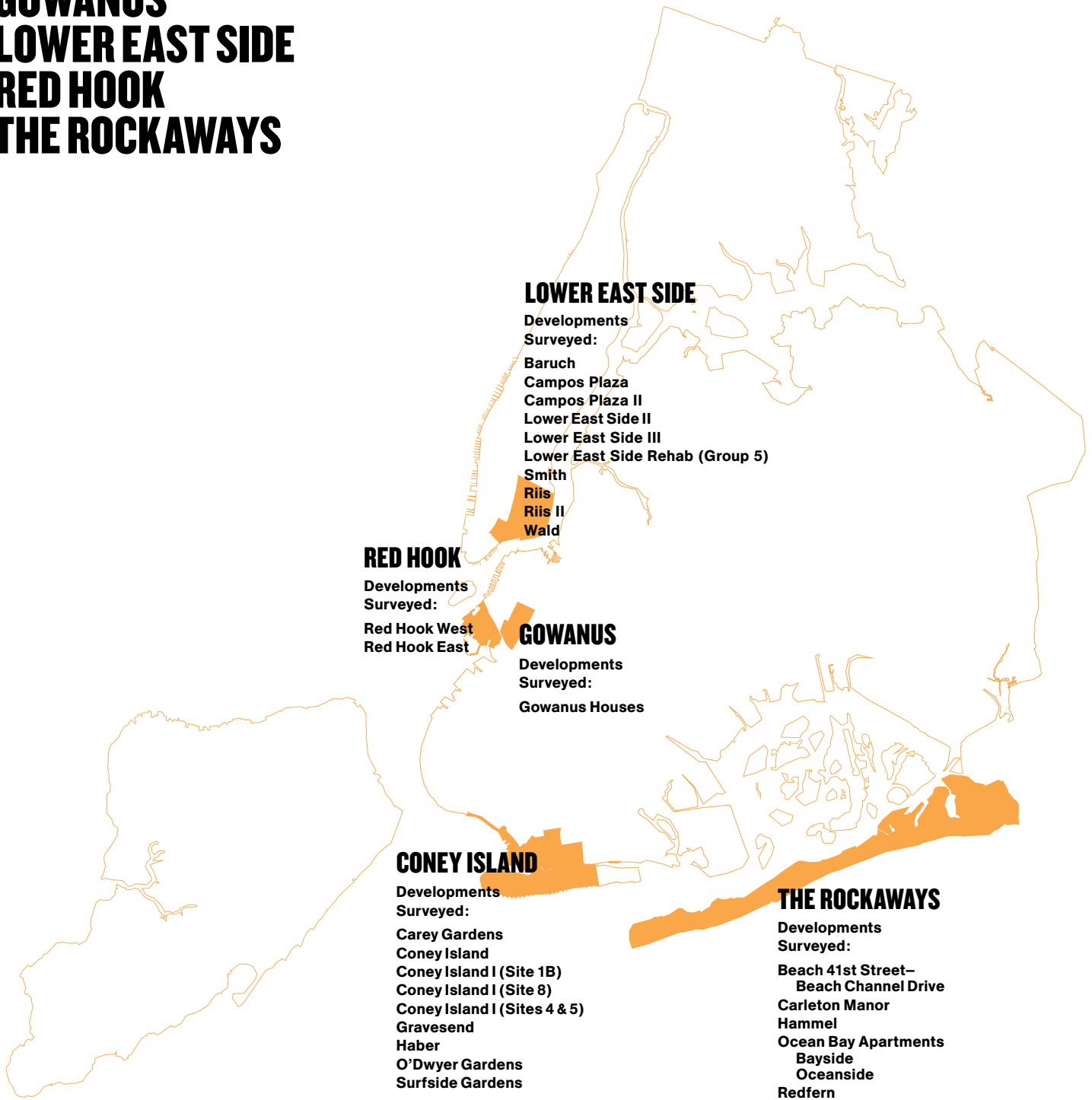
### Apprenticeship Programs

Apprenticeship programs are structured skill acquisition programs that generally take place on a job site and are the entry point into higher career positions. Each union has their own particulars for apprenticeship enrollment policies. For the Laborers and other Construction trades, there are specific times of the year for enrollment. Once enrolled, the union takes on the worker for a life-time career, not a single job. This makes getting into apprenticeship programs often very competitive. Other unions do not require apprenticeship and accept members whenever jobs become open. Some pilots have been explored to try and open up job access to NYCHA residents. These have had varying success depending on the integration with union structures. Many individuals come in with little experience working a steady job and so providing supportive programs to help individuals gain the soft skills necessary to succeed on the job are also critical.



# NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACT & RESPONSE

**CONEY ISLAND**  
**GOWANUS**  
**LOWER EAST SIDE**  
**RED HOOK**  
**THE ROCKAWAYS**





## Community Responses to Sandy



**GOWANUS**



**RED HOOK**



**LOWER EAST SIDE**



**CONEY ISLAND**



**RED HOOK**



**GOWANUS**



# CONEY ISLAND

Coney Island is located between the neighborhoods of Sea Gate and Brighton Beach in South Brooklyn and is famous for its amusement park and beaches. Amid these recreational attractions, Coney Island has a large public housing population. There are nine public housing developments with nearly 10,000 residents.<sup>93</sup> Due to its location, all of Brooklyn Community Board 13, of which Coney Island is a part, is in a hurricane evacuation zone and 97% of residential units were in the Sandy surge area – more than any other community district in New York City.<sup>94</sup>

With almost its entire resident population in a surge area, and some areas experiencing up to 10 feet of flooding, Coney Island was drastically affected by the storm. A quarter of area residents lost their homes.<sup>95</sup> Weeks and months after the storm, businesses struggled to re-open, making food, water and other supplies difficult to find. NYCHA developments were especially impacted due to substantial sand and saltwater infiltration.<sup>96</sup> Even with all of this devastation, the official relief to Coney Island was extremely slow in reaching residents, especially to public housing residents in high-rise buildings.<sup>97</sup>

## Some key data from our surveys in Coney Island includes

Post-Sandy, survey respondents got information through

**74%**

Word of mouth

**32%**

Flyers

**77%**

report NYCHA has not been quicker to take care of repair needs post-Sandy

**25%**

had visible mold before Sandy

**37%**

have visible mold after Sandy

**72%**

not currently working

**11%**

have been informed of new job opportunities with NYCHA

## Community Groups Spotlight: Community Voices Heard (CVH) & The People's Coalition



### Mission of CVH

Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a member-led multi-racial organization, principally women of color and low-income families in New York State that builds power to secure social, economic and racial justice for all. They accomplish this through grassroots organizing, leadership development, policy changes, and creating new models of direct democracy.

### Mission of The People's Coalition

The People's Coalition of Coney Island is a coordinating body for Coney Island leaders and residents seeking to make positive change in their community. The Coalition is committed to educating community residents concerning their rights and responsibilities, advocating for transparency and fairness, and encouraging open and honest communication and coordination of effort.

### Response to Sandy

Since Sandy, CVH has worked to organize public housing residents in Sandy affected areas, including Coney Island, around issues that arose due to the storm. CVH has done this through outreach, surveying, tying residents into CVH's citywide public housing work, and partnering with the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding. Immediately after Hurricane Sandy, People's Relief (a predecessor to People's Coalition) provided relief and support to low-income communities and communities of color in Coney Island. As relief needs diminished, relationships built during the relief effort evolved into a longer-term coalition structure. People's Coalition is now working on a variety of local issues of importance to Coney Island residents. CVH member-leaders are also active in the People's Coalition in Coney Island.



# Public Housing in CONEY ISLAND

191

Surveys collected  
9 of 9 Developments Surveyed

9

Developments

40

Buildings

4,091

Units

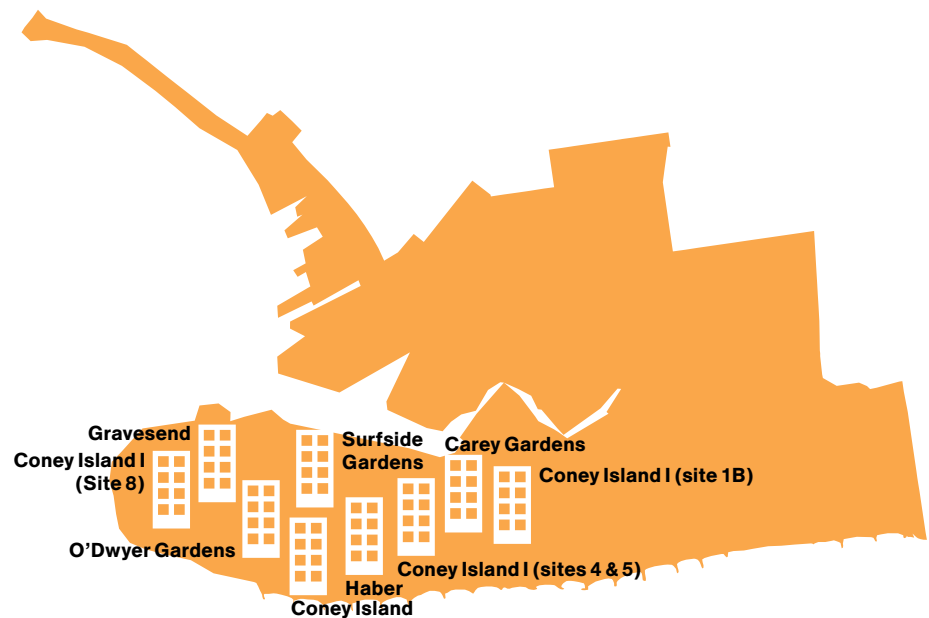
9,254

Residents

Area defined for this report is Coney Island peninsula between W 37th Street and Stillwell Ave. "Maps." Community Board 13.

<http://brooklyncb13.org/maps/>

Map of Surveyed Developments



## Demographics of Survey Respondents in CONEY ISLAND<sup>98</sup>

### Gender

61%	38%	1%
Female	Male	Other
55% (Census data for neighborhood)	45%	N/A

### Race / Ethnicity

56%	28%	10%	7%	0%
African American	Hispanic or Latino/a	White	Other	Asian
39% (Census data)	26%	23%	1%	11%

### Primary Language (Census data)

48%	19%
English	Spanish

33%  
Other

### Household Income (Census data)

36%  
Below poverty

\$24,296  
Area Median Income<sup>ae</sup>

### Housing Units (Census data)

11%  
Owner

89%  
Rent

42%  
Public Housing



# GOWANUS

Located around the Gowanus Canal in Southern Brooklyn, Gowanus is the only neighborhood detailed in this report that was not in Hurricane Evacuation Zone A when Sandy hit. Gowanus is also unique from the other neighborhoods in this report in that the area surrounding the NYCHA developments is increasingly affluent, with brownstones selling for millions of dollars. The three NYCHA developments in Gowanus, Gowanus Houses, 572 Warren Street and Wyckoff Gardens, comprise 25% of the renter-occupied units in the neighborhood.<sup>99, 100</sup> Out of the three developments, Gowanus Houses was the only one impacted by Hurricane Sandy and thus the only site of surveying for this report.

When Hurricane Sandy hit, the storm surge caused the Gowanus canal to overflow, flooding five buildings in the Gowanus Houses. Water from the canal also corroded wiring beneath the street level and left residents without power. Residents were left without power for days while NYCHA and Con Edison argued over who was responsible to make repairs and restore power to residents. Despite these issues the needs of Gowanus Houses were largely ignored in the official response because of its placement in Zone B. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that social programs have been made less available to public housing residents due to the wealth of the surrounding neighborhood.

## Community Group Spotlight: Families United For Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE)



Families United for Racial and Economic Equality  
Familias Unidas Para Igualdad Racial y Económica

### Mission of FUREE

Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE) is a Brooklyn-based multi-racial organization made up almost exclusively of women of color. FUREE organizes low-income families to build power to change the system so that all people's work is valued and all people have the right and economic means to decide and live out their own destinies.

### Response to Sandy

When Sandy hit the Gowanus Houses, FUREE took action and set up an ad hoc relief hub in the Gowanus Community Center. FUREE coordinated volunteers, prepared meals, refilled prescription medications and canvassed buildings to ensure basic needs were met. Since Sandy, FUREE advocated to have the Gowanus development placed in Zone 1 and is working to fully reopen the Gowanus community center so it can serve as a place for services and programming that residents want and need.

### Some key data from our surveys in Gowanus includes

89%

did not evacuate their  
apartments before Sandy

49%

of respondents did NOT  
receive information  
about Hurricane Sandy  
from NYCHA

63%

did not get the help  
they applied for from  
the government

34%

had mold in their apart-  
ment after Hurricane  
Sandy

85%

have not been informed  
about job opportunities  
with NYCHA



## Public Housing in GOWANUS

38

Surveys collected

1 of 3 Developments Surveyed (see map)

3

Developments

18

Buildings

1,864

Units

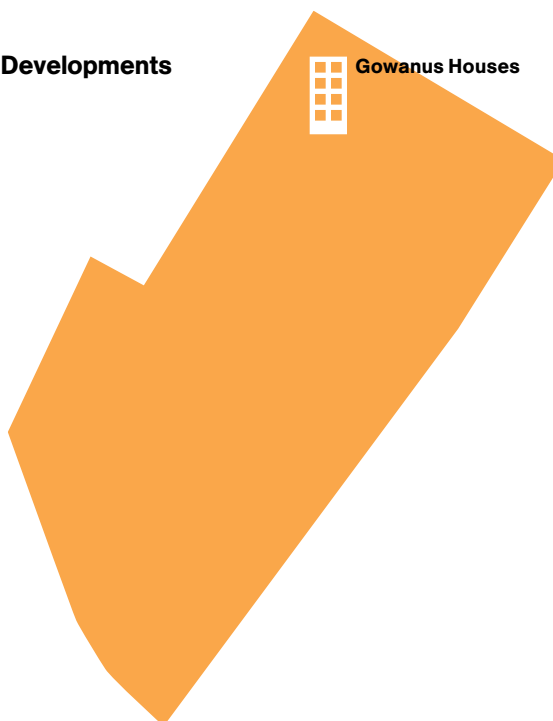
4,401

Residents

Area defined for this report is North: Wyckoff Street; East: 4th Avenue; South: Hamilton Avenue/Prospect Avenue; West: Court Street.  
"Maps." Community Board 6.

<http://www.brooklyn6.org/maps/>

### Map of Surveyed Developments



## Demographics of Survey Respondents in GOWANUS<sup>101</sup>

### Gender

59%

Female

52% (Census data for neighborhood)

41%

Male

48%

0%

Other

N/A

### Race / Ethnicity

67%

African American

15% (Census data)

23%

Hispanic or Latino/a

29%

3%

White

47%

3%

Other

2%

3%

Asian

7%

### Primary Language (Census data)

64%

English

25%

Spanish

14%

Below poverty

11%

Other

### Household Income (Census data)

\$65,631

Area Median Income

### Housing Units (Census data)

26%

Owner

74%

Rent

19%

Public Housing



# LOWER EAST SIDE

The Lower East Side (LES) is a densely populated immigrant community located in Lower Manhattan. The LES has a rich history of community organizing and many grassroots community organizations serve its diverse population, which includes many public housing residents. There are 26 NYCHA developments in the LES, accounting for 23% of rental units and housing more than 30,000 residents.<sup>102</sup> When Hurricane Sandy sent a 13-foot storm surge that flooded the streets of the LES, the presence of these community organizations along with local elected officials was invaluable given the inadequate relief efforts by the city government and NYCHA.

In addition to serious flooding, Sandy also left most LES residents without power for at least a week, with some not having their power restored for nearly a month. Many residents, particularly the elderly and those with limited English proficiency, were unable to get information to access critical services in the immediate aftermath and long after the storm. Without electricity, elevators were not working, trapping seniors and residents with disabilities in their apartments. Many of these buildings also rely on electric pumps to bring water and the lack of electricity left these buildings without running water. The flooding also damaged underground phone lines leaving people without phone service well after the storm.

Despite all of these issues, the response of government, including OEM, NYCHA, the Mayor's office and FEMA did not fully address the needs of LES residents following Sandy. While community groups and local elected officials and their staff provided on-the-ground relief, coordination and filled the holes of the government effort, residents still struggled in the days and weeks after the storm.

## Community Group Spotlight: Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)



### Mission of GOLES

GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side) is a 35-year-old membership organization that serves the Lower East Side. They are dedicated to working on tenants' rights, homelessness prevention, economic security, and environmental and racial justice. They accomplish this through direct services, public education and training, community organizing, community-based research and leadership development.

### Response to Sandy

GOLES' relief efforts began with the staff who reside in the community assessing needs and canvassing the area to provide residents with disaster assistance information. From the GOLES' office, staff and members coordinated nearly 3,000 volunteers to bring relief and assistance to more than 15,000 households, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable. In the months after the storm, GOLES has worked with many other local groups to create a Long Term Recovery Group, called LES Ready that will continue to provide relief and increase the resiliency and preparedness of the Lower East Side community. LES Ready is currently conducting community-based research to develop a community-based disaster preparedness plan that will ensure that the voices of low-income residents are included in planning for the future.

### Some key data from our surveys in LES includes

**47%**

were denied the government assistance for which they applied

**70%**

accessed voluntary help/relief/assistance after the storm

**84%**

were told they have to wait 6 months or more to receive repairs for their apartments

**48%**

had mold after Hurricane Sandy

**34%**

had mold before Hurricane Sandy

**59%**

report mold has affected their health



## Public Housing in LOWER EAST SIDE

93

Surveys collected

10 of 26 Developments Surveyed

26

Developments

139

Buildings

14,440

Units

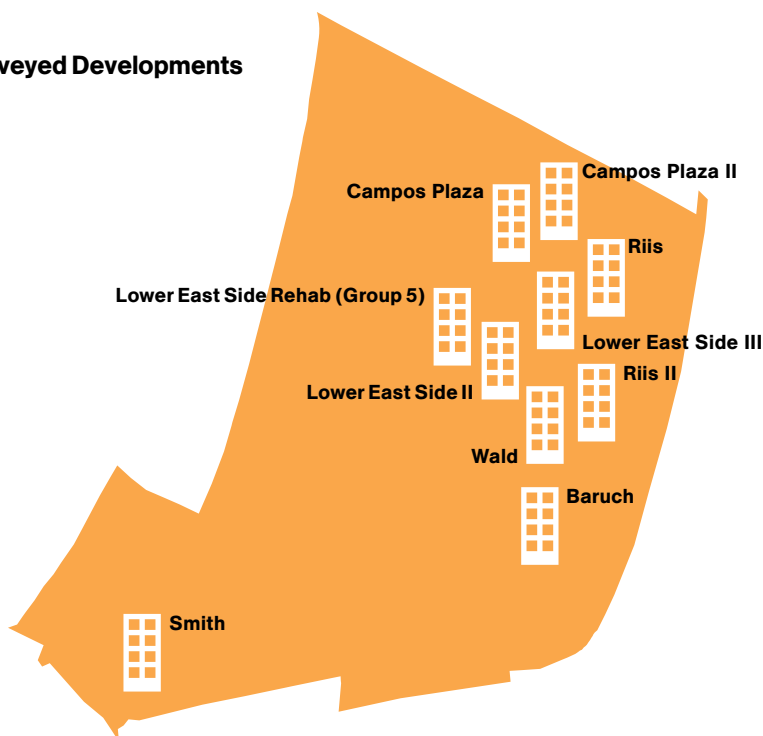
32,401

Residents

For this report the geography of the Lower East Side is defined as Manhattan Community Board 3, with its boundaries as: North: 14th Street; East: East River; South: Brooklyn Bridge/Pearl Street; West: Bowery/4th Avenue. "District Profile." *Community Board 3*.

[http://www.nyc.gov/html/mancb3/html/district/district\\_profile.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/mancb3/html/district/district_profile.shtml)

Map of Surveyed Developments



## Demographics of Survey Respondents in LOWER EAST SIDE <sup>103</sup>

### Gender

78%

Female

52% (Census data for neighborhood)

22%

Male

48%

0%

Other

N/A

### Race / Ethnicity

66%

Hispanic or Latino/a

24% (Census data)

24%

African American

7%

3%

White

33%

6%

Other

3%

2%

Asian

34%

### Primary Language (Census data)

45%

English

19%

Spanish

26%

Below poverty

35%

Other

\$47,574

Area Median Income

### Housing Units (Census data)

13%

Owner

87%

Rent

20%

Public Housing



# RED HOOK

The neighborhood of Red Hook is located in South Brooklyn and surrounded by water on three sides – Gowanus Canal to the East, Gowanus Bay to the South, and Buttermilk Channel to the West – and has no subway stations, making it difficult to reach. This makes Red Hook a very insular and close knit community, prompting the New York Times to write, “Most impressively, Red Hook is a true community in a city where that notion is becoming more abstract all the time.”<sup>104</sup>

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Red Hook showed off its “true community” with residents, community organizations, and local businesses all providing what they could for their neighbors who were in need. This was not a small number: nearly 11,000 people live in the neighborhood and the vast majority of those live in Zone A.<sup>105</sup> Also, Red Hook is not a wealthy neighborhood and has the second largest public housing development in the city, Red Hook Houses.<sup>106</sup> These factors could have led to devastating consequences when Sandy reached New York, but instead the community worked to help one another and mitigate the impact of the storm.

Despite the community cohesion, Red Hook still faced difficulties. During the storm, Sandy turned streets into rivers six feet deep, causing immense damage to local business and public housing buildings, which already had repair needs and issues with mold. Due to Red Hook’s insularity, there is low foot traffic in the neighborhood and when businesses were closed there was a profound impact on employment opportunities and business sustainability.

## Some key data from our surveys in Red Hook includes

**52%**

report having mold in their apartment following Sandy

**41%**

report that NYCHA has done nothing about mold

**36%**

report that mold was cleaned up poorly and is coming back

**44%**

of survey respondents in Red Hook are currently unemployed

**12%**

have heard about job opportunities with NYCHA

## Community Groups Spotlight: Red Hook Initiative (RHI) & Community Voices Heard (CVH)



### Mission of RHI

RHI believes that social change to overcome systemic inequities begins with empowered youth. In partnership with community adults, RHI nurtures young people in Red Hook to be inspired, resilient, and healthy, and to envision themselves as co-creators of their lives, community and society.

### Mission of CVH

Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a member-led multi-racial organization, principally women of color and low-income families in New York State that builds power to secure social, economic and racial justice for all. They accomplish this through grassroots organizing, leadership development, policy changes, and creating new models of direct democracy.

### Response to Sandy

Immediately after the storm, RHI’s doors were open 12 to 14 hours per day for 24 consecutive days, offering a place for residents to stay warm and get food, supplies, medical attention and information. Beyond the immediate response, RHI focused on long-term recovery and supporting residents to handle emerging issues. RHI also partnered with Community Voices Heard to support organizing work in the neighborhood. CVH has since been working with residents of Red Hook Houses to identify repair needs and figure out how to ensure that the problems in the buildings get adequately addressed as well as connect interested residents up to CVH’s citywide public housing organizing efforts. To learn more about RHI’s work around Sandy response and recovery read their report at

[http://rhicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/RHI-Hurricane-Report-6\\_2013.pdf](http://rhicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/RHI-Hurricane-Report-6_2013.pdf)

To see a five minute video made by CVH highlighting some of the public housing repair needs in Red Hook Houses one year after Sandy see:

<http://CVHaction.org/OneYearAfterSandy>



## Public Housing in RED HOOK

# 139

Surveys collected

2 of 2 Developments Surveyed (see map)

# 2

Developments

# 30

Buildings

# 2,878

Units

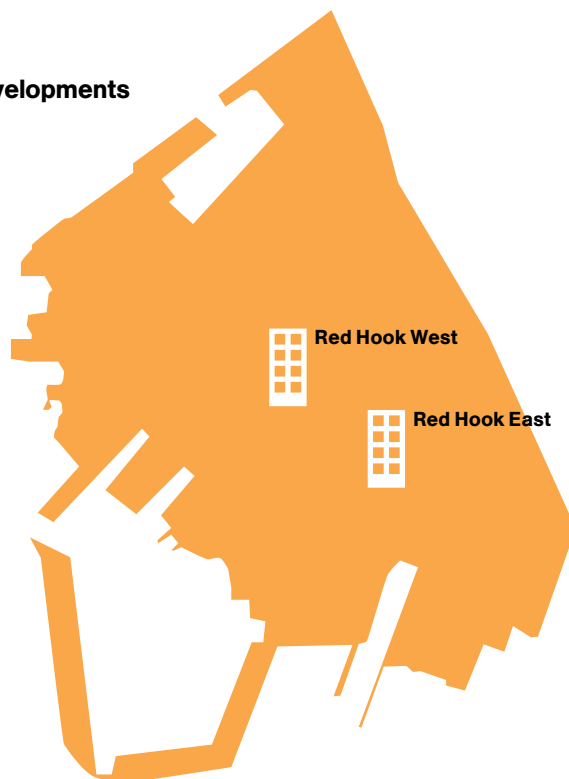
# 6,351

Residents

For this report, the geography of Red Hook is defined as: North: Gowanus Expressway; East: Gowanus Canal; South: Atlantic Avenue; West: East River. "Maps." *Community Board 6*.

<http://www.brooklyn6.org/maps/>

Map of Surveyed Developments



## Demographics of Survey Respondents in RED HOOK <sup>107</sup>

### Gender

# 67%

Female

**55%** (Census data for neighborhood)

# 33%

Male

**45%**

# 0%

Other

**N/A**

### Race / Ethnicity

# 57%

African American

**33%** (Census data)

# 42%

Hispanic or Latino/a

**46%**

# 1%

White

**17%**

# 1%

Asian

**2%**

# 0%

Other

**1%**

### Primary Language (Census data)

# 57%

English

# 36%

Spanish

# 17%

Other

### Household Income (Census data)

# 38%

Below poverty

# \$34,073

Area Median Income

### Housing Units (Census data)

# 5%

Owner

# 95%

Rent

# 64%

Public Housing



# FAR ROCKAWAY

The Rockaways form a peninsula in Southern Queens composed of several neighborhoods and is the only unobstructed coastline in New York City. Accordingly, while The Rockaways are known for the beaches, the neighborhood is far removed from the rest of the city, making it difficult to reach. Due to this distance and the desire of past city planners to isolate poverty, several public housing developments were built in the area starting in the 1950s continuing to the 1970s.<sup>108</sup> Today, there are six NYCHA developments in The Rockaways, accounting for 17% of the rental units in the area.<sup>109,110</sup>

When Hurricane Sandy made landfall on October 29th, The Rockaways was one of the hardest hit areas in the city. 84% of residential units were in the Sandy surge area.<sup>111</sup> Flooding was up to fourteen feet in some places, destroying part of the boardwalk, thousands of homes, and the subway tracks connecting The Rockaways to the rest of the city. Besides the damage caused directly by the storm surge, several fires broke out destroying 175 homes and businesses.<sup>112</sup> After the storm, all of The Rockaways was without power for 11 days. By the third week of November, 23,000 people living in The Rockaways still did not have electricity.<sup>113</sup>

While The Rockaways received significant attention in Sandy's aftermath, government response was still not sufficient to meet residents' needs. This was especially true of residents of public housing.

## Some key data from our surveys in Far Rockaway includes

**76%**

of survey respondents applied for government relief

**49%**

received the assistance they applied for

**73%**

accessed voluntary help/relief/assistance after the storm

**24%**

know someone who has not returned to their apartment – more than half because their apartment still needs repairs

**53%**

have visible mold in their apartment after Sandy

**58%**

of survey respondents are not currently working

## Community Groups Spotlight: Faith in New York (FINY) & New York Communities for Change (NYCC)



**NYCommunities**  
for Change

### Mission of FINY

The mission of Faith in New York is to equip congregations and develop grassroots leaders to move significant public policy change that supports leaders' vision of a more just New York City with excellent public schools, violence-free neighborhoods, access to good jobs, adequate and affordable health care, decent housing for all, and where people of all backgrounds can fully participate in economic and civic life.

### Mission of NYCC

New York Communities for Change is a coalition of working families in low and moderate income communities fighting for social and economic justice throughout New York State. By using direct action, legislative advocacy, and community organizing, NY Communities' members work to impact the political and economic policies that directly affect them.

### Response to Sandy

After Sandy both FINY and NYCC coordinated volunteers, knocked on doors to deliver supplies, and collected information from those neglected by major relief organizations. Beyond immediate relief efforts, both groups are members of the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, are engaged in organizing to address the shortage of recovery resources for low-income communities and worked to secure repairs and mold remediation for people whose homes were still damaged months after the storm. As part of the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, the groups also helped to organize a Mayoral Candidates Summit in June 2013 with 1,423 New Yorkers including Sandy survivors and public housing residents as well as a Mayoral Candidates Tour in September 2013.



## Public Housing in FAR ROCKAWAY

113

Surveys collected

6 of 6 Developments Surveyed

6

Developments

59

Buildings

3,986

Units

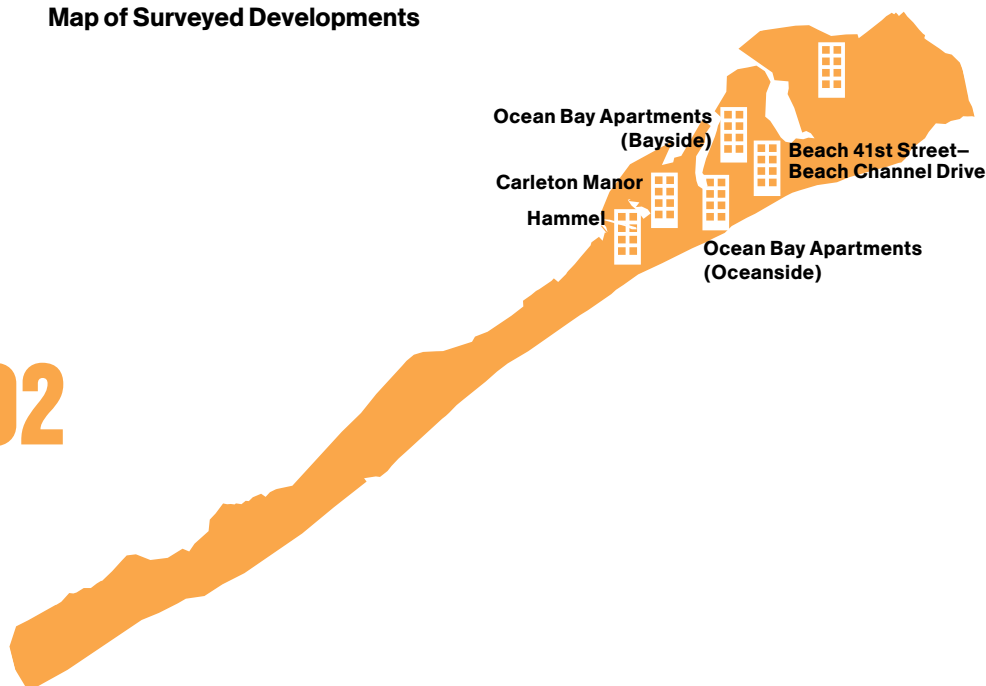
10,092

Residents

For this report, the neighborhood is defined as Queens Community Board 14, excluding for the neighborhood of Broad Channel which is an island in Jamaica Bay. "Maps." *Community Board 14*.

<http://www.queenscb14.org/maps/>

Map of Surveyed Developments



## Demographics of Survey Respondents in FAR ROCKAWAY <sup>114</sup>

### Gender

88%

Female

53% (Census data for neighborhood)

9%

Male

47%

3%

Other

N/A

### Race / Ethnicity

80%

African American

39% (Census data)

14%

Hispanic or Latino/a

22%

3%

Other

3%

2%

Asian

2%

1%

White

35%

### Primary Language (Census data)

72%

English

17%

Spanish

11%

Other

### Household Income (Census data)

22%

Below poverty

\$51,298

Area Median Income

### Housing Units (Census data)

38%

Owner

62%

Rent

10%

Public Housing



# RECOMMENDATIONS

This report reveals some of NYCHA's major challenges in the wake of Hurricane Sandy that were left unaddressed by the Bloomberg administration. It focuses on specific problems NYCHA tenants faced during and after Hurricane Sandy, and the recommendations described below will address those issues and help strengthen and improve the entire NYCHA system. We are encouraged by the City's new leadership, including Mayor Bill de Blasio, NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Chairs of the City Council's Public Housing and Recovery and Resiliency Committees, Ritchie Torres and Mark Treyger, respectively. We are hopeful that they will learn from past mistakes and tackle these challenges head on.

The additional resources coming into the City for rebuilding and resiliency post-Sandy allow our new leaders to set a higher standard and pilot initiatives that could have ripple effects across the broader NYCHA system. The following recommendations were developed by those on the ground who witness NYCHA's problems on a daily basis. We offer practical and effective solutions that will make NYCHA a better place to live for its 600,000 residents.

The recommendations focus on five key areas of necessary reform that were highlighted in the report's findings: 1) greater communication and coordination between government agencies, as well as with residents and community-based organizations; 2) expediting repairs in NYCHA buildings plagued by disinvestment and neglect and addressing the root causes of repair issues; 3) tackling the long-standing mold crisis in NYCHA buildings; 4) creating a more resilient infrastructure and 5) increasing high quality job opportunities for NYCHA residents, many of whom are currently unemployed.

## Greater Communication and Coordination with Residents and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

The aftermath of Hurricane Sandy made clear the need for the City and NYCHA to improve communication and coordination with residents and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and to invest in community-based resources. The following recommendations fall into three categories: improved communication with residents, improved coordination amongst City agencies and with CBOs, and investment in community centers and other community-based planning and resiliency work. We hope these recommendations will be incorporated into NYCHA's Hurricane Emergency Procedure that is currently being revamped.

### Improved communication with NYCHA residents

- 1 NYCHA and the Office of Emergency Management must improve communication with NYCHA residents before, during and after a natural disaster and pay special attention to ensuring that seniors, people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency get the information that they need.**



The data from our survey indicates that many NYCHA residents did not feel adequately informed about the storm, nor did they know where or how to access relief in its wake. This was particularly true for those with limited English proficiency, seniors and people with disabilities, including those with visual and hearing impairments. While NYCHA and the City have laid out recommendations such as standardizing City communication, creating an improved Incident Command Center and creating templates for flyers to facilitate faster communications<sup>115</sup>, we believe NYCHA must go further in ensuring strong lines of communication with residents. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

- **NYCHA and OEM should make all notices, flyers and announcements available in, at minimum, Spanish, Chinese and Russian, the most common languages of NYCHA residents<sup>116</sup> in addition to English as well as any other languages that are prevalent in a given NYCHA community. These should be posted prominently on every floor of the NYCHA building.**
- **The NYCHA office of Family Services that responds to residents in times of crisis should have staff that is either bilingual or is equipped with materials in the languages that are prevalent in a given NYCHA community.**
- **NYCHA and OEM should ensure access to adequate transportation for all residents, particularly for seniors, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.**
- **NYCHA should build off of their proposal for an Incident Command Center to improve response time and crisis management during a disaster. We propose an Incident Command Center with one person or a small group in charge that would then work through a phone tree of designated resident leaders and workers explaining the response plan, gathering an understanding of the situation on the ground, and ensuring open communication. This plan and structure should be developed in conjunction with workers, residents (including, but not exclusive to, official resident leadership structures) and CBOs. This plan should take into account the needs of residents with limited English proficiency.**
- **NYCHA and OEM should provide disaster preparedness training and necessary safety equipment for resident associations and NYCHA workers or provide funding to CBOs to do so.**
- **NYCHA should identify and provide stipends to building and development “captains,” in collaboration with resident leaders and community groups, to undergo more extensive emergency training, identify and map out people with critical needs in their buildings, and be on call to take on critical support tasks during emergency moments. This could build upon or be modeled after NYCHA tenant patrols and could use Tenant Participation Funds<sup>117</sup> to pay for stipends.<sup>118</sup>**



## **Improved communication and coordination within government agencies and with CBOs**

### **2 NYCHA and OEM must improve coordination and communication with each other and with Community Based Organizations in Sandy-Affected Areas.**

NYCHA and the City have already proposed some initiatives to address the communication gap with Community Based Organizations and work more closely with them in planning for a future disaster. Some of these proposals include establishing a CBO hotline activated in times of declared emergencies; a database and template form to capture and maintain CBO contacts; and an internal CBO liaison committee and coordination unit to coordinate work and communication. Furthermore, In the Sandy “After-Action Plan” the City recommends formalizing the borough recovery director structure and deploying staff to the field sooner after the storm to work with community organizations.<sup>119</sup> While these are good proposals, and we hope to work with NYCHA to ensure that they are implemented and operationalized, we offer the following additional recommendations:

- **NYCHA and OEM should make clear to residents and CBOs which staff person at each agency is the primary point person for various disaster planning and response duties. This should be clearly delineated in the NYCHA Emergency Procedure, posted in each NYCHA building and distributed to CBOs in Zone 1.**
- **Working within privacy and legal constraints, NYCHA and CBOs should work together to develop a comprehensive list of seniors, people with disabilities, and people with critical medical needs.**
- **NYCHA, the City Council and the Mayor should provide resources and training for NYCHA and CBO representatives to function as emergency first responders, going door to door to make sure the most at risk are attended to. NYCHA should coordinate teams for door-knocking in the most common languages of NYCHA residents.**
- **The City should provide ongoing funding for community organizations that work with NYCHA residents so that they can continue to provide critical services to residents and facilitate communication between the City government, NYCHA and NYCHA residents.**
- **NYCHA should pilot a Participatory Budgeting process, where residents decide how to spend a portion of the NYCHA budget. This could build off the successful PB process in the City Council and help to build relationships between NYCHA officials and residents and help build networks, knowledge and social capital amongst residents. This PB process could help to address ongoing needs of residents including but not limited to those arising from Sandy.**



## **Investment in year-round, resident-led community centers**

### **3 NYCHA, the Mayor and the City Council should invest in creating vibrant community centers within NYCHA developments so that these can serve as community resources during natural disasters and beyond.**

NYCHA community centers have the potential to fill a void by providing an easily accessible space where residents can access emergency resources, social services and build networks with their neighbors, all of which would help build the necessary human and social infrastructure for more resilient public housing communities. NYCHA has proposed using select community centers in each borough as Base Locations from which local, site-based centralized management of emergency response will be performed. While this is a step in the right direction, we offer the following recommendations to take NYCHA's plan a step further:

- **NYCHA, the City Council and the Mayor need to provide ongoing funding for NYCHA community centers (operating in NYCHA buildings), so that they can be activated as resource centers and information hubs in times of need.**
- **NYCHA Community Centers should not only be relief hubs but also need to be available to community members and groups for year-round programming, storage of supplies and other needs that are identified and prioritized by community members.**

## **Expediting and Addressing Root Causes of Repair Problems in NYCHA Buildings**

As our report points out, repair needs are not new for NYCHA residents: Hurricane Sandy illuminated and exacerbated problems that were already negatively impacting the vast majority of residents. While federal disinvestment in public housing contributes to the repair crisis, there are steps NYCHA can take to improve the repairs process and backlog. Some of the suggestions put forth by the City's Sandy After-action plan, such as contracting for emergency on-call electricians and plumbers to install generators and boilers and establishing emergency contracts for additional critical resources such as generators, boilers and electrical switchgear, are a step in the right direction for disaster planning.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, while the commitment by NYCHA and the City to reduce the back log of repairs was a positive step, there have been reported concerns about the plan's implementation.<sup>121</sup> Accordingly, NYCHA needs to go further to invest in fixing systemic, underlying problems to ensure that NYCHA residents can live in safe and healthy conditions. These recommendations fall under the following categories: 1) tackling the on-going mold crisis; 2) increasing the transparency of the repairs process and progress made on the backlog and 3) creating a resilient infrastructure to address long-term repair needs.



## **Tackling the long-term mold crisis and addressing the health and safety of residents**

As noted in this report and highlighted in the recent Baez settlement and media coverage; mold is a serious and on-going problem for NYCHA residents. The settlement mandates that NYCHA must complete simple repairs in 7 days and complex ones in 15 days after they are assessed, as they relate to mold and asthma.<sup>122</sup> In addition, NYS legislation introduced by State Senator Sanders would require NYCHA to clean up mold within 15 days. While the settlement and legislation are important steps in addressing the mold crisis in NYCHA, there are critical issues that they do not address, which are outlined in the following recommendations.

- 4 NYCHA must go beyond temporary, surface-level fixes for mold and address deeper infrastructure and chronic, uncontrolled moisture issues such as leaky roofs and old pipes.**
- 5 NYCHA must establish and adhere to a clear timeline from the time a tenant reports a mold problem until the time of inspection and should take preventative measures to assess mold in all NYCHA developments, before problems are reported.**

This could include:

- **Once mold is called in to the call center, it should be inspected within a two week period (and a one week period if young children and/ or asthma cases are identified in the household). The mold should then get treated according to the timeline identified in the recent Baez settlement.**
- **A full-scale, door-to-door assessment of mold problems in Sandy-affected zones as a start and then an expansion of this initiative to other NYCHA buildings and developments.**
- **NYCHA should institutionalize the use of moisture meters to regularly check the moisture levels in NYCHA buildings, particularly those in Sandy-affected zones. Currently NYCHA does not have moisture meters to assist it in diagnosing a problem. Experts agree that moisture meters are a crucial tool to identify the extent of moisture and in some instances the source.**
- **NYCHA should create a mechanism for residents to give ongoing input to senior NYCHA management about the mold problem in their apartments and buildings. This could include quarterly townhall meetings or surveys of residents.**



- **Mold cases that include health and safety concerns such as asthma should be added to the “emergency repair” list thereby being advanced to the top of the overall repair list.**

## **6 NYCHA should create a program modeled on Back Home, Back to Work (BHBW), piloted in Sandy’s aftermath, to provide job training to public housing residents in how to conduct safe and healthy mold remediation.**

BHBW is an innovative labor-community initiative to provide safe and effective mold assessment and remediation by tapping into hundreds of qualified expert contractors and union workers with the training, skills, and protections to properly remove mold from homes and businesses.<sup>123</sup> BHBW proposes to handle mold remediation in a systematic and cost-effective way that goes block by block rather than one business or house at a time – in NYCHA’s case, apartment by apartment. The program would create hundreds of family-sustaining jobs for union and non-union workers by providing safety and skills training to local residents and other populations with extra barriers to obtaining employment, including the long-term unemployed, the formerly incarcerated, and public assistance recipients, and placing them into union jobs.<sup>124</sup> Currently, NYCHA residents and apartments are not eligible for some of the rebuilding programs and funds; this would create a new program specifically targeted at addressing NYCHA mold cases.

### **Increasing transparency and accountability measures to improve and expedite the repair process**

## **7 NYCHA should be more transparent in publicizing repair needs and progress.**

- **Each month, NYCHA should create a list of repair requests categorized by building or development and make this available to the public on its website. The list and website should be updated regularly as repairs are made and should be available in the most common languages of NYCHA residents other than English. This will allow NYCHA to identify patterns in repair needs and prioritize those buildings with the most acute need, and will give the community and other government entities such as the City Council and Public Advocate the ability to provide oversight of NYCHA.**
- **The City should create a Watch List for NYCHA properties, similar to the “NYC Worst Landlord List” (for private housing) and later the NYCHA “Watch List” (<http://nychawatchlist.com/>) set up by Mayor de Blasio while he was the Public Advocate. This list would include the NYCHA developments with the most unmet repair needs and would be monitored by the Public Advocate and/ or the City Council Public Housing Committee to ensure that plans exist and are being implemented to address the acute repair needs in a timely fashion.**



- **NYCHA should develop training materials for residents and CBOs explaining NYCHA's capital repair needs and how capital budget decisions are currently made. Insight into the process and current limitations could clarify why certain needs are prioritized and galvanize advocacy for NYCHA's needs.**

## **Creating a Resilient Infrastructure for NYCHA**

### **8 NYCHA should create more resilient infrastructure by installing Cogeneration (CHP) capacity in Zone I developments.**

Cogeneration, which has been successfully implemented in various housing authorities, captures the waste produced in the power generation process and reuses it onsite to meet demands for hot water, steam or cooling.<sup>125</sup> Cogeneration provides enormous benefits in terms of resiliency, cost efficiency and climate change mitigation. It can also draw funding into NYCHA from New York State Public Service Commission-administrated funds and from the New York Power Authority. Most critically, it would generate savings that could, with HUD's co-operation, be redirected to repair of mold, leaks and other issues that pre-dated Sandy.<sup>126</sup>

### **9 NYCHA should replace temporary boilers and move all boilers and critical wiring systems of Zone I developments on to higher ground.**

While NYCHA has recognized the importance of this recommendation and proposed a similar measure,<sup>127</sup> due to funding constraints, 16 NYCHA developments still have 24 mobile boilers and none have been raised above flood levels. We encourage NYCHA to prioritize this work and to continue to advocate for funding so it can be done soon.

## **Increasing High-Quality Job Opportunities and Increasing Economic Resiliency for NYCHA Residents and Workers**

NYCHA residents are in critical need of jobs, with fifty-six percent of all working age residents in NYCHA not reporting income from employment.<sup>128</sup> While standards such as Section 3 and pilot programs such as Jobs Plus exist to promote resident hiring and Sandy created an opportunity for job creation, very few residents were hired or trained for new jobs after the storm. This problem is not unique to Sandy; NYCHA residents rarely hear about job or training opportunities. To address this and get more NYCHA residents to work, we recommend the following:

### **10 NYCHA should ensure that more jobs go to residents, particularly jobs created with CDBG funds.**



To do this, NYCHA should:

- **Create job centers at NYCHA community centers. The Job Plus Program<sup>129, 130</sup>, which has proven to work effectively at connecting people to jobs and increasing their wages, could serve as a model and be expanded into public housing in Sandy-affected zones. A good start would be creating at least one Jobs Plus site in each of the Sandy-affected zones.**
- **Enforce and strengthen Section 3 by requiring contractors to ensure that 30% of total hours worked on capital projects are completed by public housing and other low-income residents (rather than just 30% of new hires) and being comprehensive and transparent in its Section 3 reporting. Given, that CDBG funds are subject to Section 3, NYCHA could use the funds coming in post-Sandy as an opportunity to demonstrate what this stronger set of standards could achieve.**
- **Create an effective communications strategy to announce jobs and training opportunities to residents so that they actually hear about them. This could include posting positions on fliers in buildings, on rent receipts mailed to residents, and announcing them through robo calls.**
- **Be transparent in their reporting about who gets jobs and what the jobs are. Quarterly reporting by NYCHA should be done on job placements for public housing residents including the type, duration, wages and benefits of the job.**

## **11 NYCHA should establish robust pre-apprenticeship programs and connect residents to them so that they can be trained and prepared for the apprenticeship slots and subsequent jobs that open up.**

This could be modeled after a new program from the Laborers that helps identify strong candidates, works to improve their readiness for apprenticeship programs, and helps them apply to these programs. This program should also provide resources (metro cards, lunch stipends, hours counting for welfare requirements, etc.) to support long-term employment.

## **12 NYCHA should ensure that more work is going to high quality union contractors through adopting job standard language for all Requests for Proposals and Requests for Qualifications.**



# ENDNOTES

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- 7 Eric Lipton and Michael Moss, "Housing Agency's Flaws Revealed by Storm," *New York Times*, December 9, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/10/nyregion/new-york-city-housing-agency-was-overwhelmed-after-storm.html?pagewanted=all>
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- 9 Cara Buckley and Michael Wilson, "In New York's Public Housing, Fear Creeps in With the Dark," *New York Times*, November 12, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/03/nyregion/in-public-housing-after-hurricane-sandy-fear-misery-and-heroism.html>
- 10 Eric Lipton and Michael Moss, "Housing Agency's Flaws Revealed by Storm," *New York Times*, December 9, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/10/nyregion/new-york-city-housing-agency-was-overwhelmed-after-storm.html?pagewanted=all>
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**Photo Credits:** Rachel Falcone, Michael Harlan Turkell, John Moore, Kamau Ware, Heather Craig





# MARCH 2014

A stylized map of the Long Island Sound area, including parts of New York City, the Rockaways, and Coney Island. Three regions are highlighted in orange: Red Hook (top), the Rockaways (middle), and Coney Island (bottom). White building icons are placed within these orange regions. The background is a solid blue color.

NYCHA has the opportunity to really help Red Hook before we are hit with another Sandy. They have a way to actively prevent the loss of power, heat and hot water if they act on what they have learned from Sandy. I hope we don't have to wait another year before we see these changes.

—Red Hook Houses resident  
**RED HOOK**

It was difficult to get a job prior to Hurricane Sandy, but after the storm it seemed almost impossible for a large number of folks.

—Carleton Manor resident  
**FAR ROCKAWAY**

The mold situation in my apartment started before Sandy hit. It started in my closet area and moved up the wall to the ceiling. I submitted a ticket to NYCHA and they came out to fix the mold. But all they did was paint over it.

—Gravesend Houses resident  
**CONEY ISLAND**