



# MORRISANIA THE BRONX

Neighborhood Arts and Cultural Inventory



**NYC**  
Cultural Affairs

Bill de Blasio  
Mayor  
Tom Finkelpearl  
Commissioner



WHEDco  
DreamYard



## **BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY**

**Building Community Capacity (BCC)**, takes a collaborative and comprehensive approach to building cultural capacity in targeted low-income neighborhoods. This multi-year program strives to ensure both that culture is included as part of the City's interagency efforts around neighborhood planning, affordable housing, and economic development; and that local cultural stakeholders have ownership and voice in their own community's development efforts.

## **IN THIS REPORT**

The research data and analysis outlined in the following sections express the voices of 529 Morrisania community members representing a broad cross-section of people who live, work, and visit the neighborhood.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD BACKGROUND**

Morrisania has a rich history of arts and cultural vibrancy and innovation. Today, the area is one of the most diverse in New York City based on the variety of languages and countries of origin represented. Despite generations of institutional disinvestment, Morrisania and the Bronx at large are in the early days of a cultural revival that builds on and celebrates its history; this report seeks to celebrate that history and these community assets while unearthing opportunities for increased investment.

The area which we know today as the Bronx was called Rananchqua by the Siwanoy band of the Lenape people, whose territory stretched across the Mid-Atlantic. Other native people referred to it as Keskekeck.

The Dutch arrived in the area over 400 years ago. Its first recorded settler, Jonas Bronck, sold his farmland in 1660 to Welsh settler Captain Richard Morris who then changed the area's name from Broncksland to Morrisania. The Morris property, present-day Morrisania, was partitioned and leased to farmers, many of whom used slave labor prior to the abolition of slavery in New York State in 1827. Morrisania remained sparsely populated until the early 1800s when the Morris family allowed the railroad to extend across their property.

The predominantly agrarian population began to shift and grow as new immigrants from Ireland and Germany located to the area, becoming construction workers, shopkeepers, and brewers. In 1855 the town of Morrisania was established as one of the new population centers that sprang up along the rail lines.

The majority of the population growth in the Bronx throughout the 20th century was comprised of immigrant populations; primarily Irish, Italian, and Eastern European Jews in the first few decades. This time period also coincided with the construction of Yankee Stadium (1923) and the Bronx County Courthouse (1931) along East 161st Street, establishing the corridor—especially at its intersection with the Grand Concourse—as one of the most vital in the borough.

After World War II, the demographic patterns in the Bronx began to shift; many of the families who lived in the Bronx moved out to the suburbs, as new migrant populations moved in, including African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans and Puerto Ricans. Morrisania was home to scores of clubs, theaters, and venues. Historic schools like Morris High School and PS 2/PS 63, which produced nationally-renowned R&B teenage groups like The Chantels, while nurturing hip hop's and jazz's beginnings, speak to the community's rich legacy of arts innovation.

For the purposes of this initiative, we define “culture” as an expression of local history, food, painting, theater, quilts, zoos, museums, dominoes, music, libraries, poetry, art, fashion, science and so much more.

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## **STUDY AREA**

NORTH: Crotona Park South

SOUTH: East 161st Street

EAST: Prospect Avenue

WEST: Park Avenue

Front cover photos: left to right  
Top: Elena Martinez; E.B.  
Gallardo, Bottom: Edwin Pagan;  
DreamYard



Photo Credit: Joe Conzo Jr.

EVELINA LOPEZ ANTONETTY  
1922 - 1984  
EDUCATOR, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST,  
ADVOCATE FOR PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE  
FOUNDER OF UNITED BRONX PARENTS  
THE BRONX, NEW YORK  
- 1980 -

The Third Avenue Elevated Rail ceased its Bronx operations in the mid-20th century, closing south of 149th Street between 1950-1955, and north of 149th Street in 1973. By the late 1970s, New York City was on the brink of bankruptcy and Morrisania was hit hard by the fiscal crisis and disinvestment.

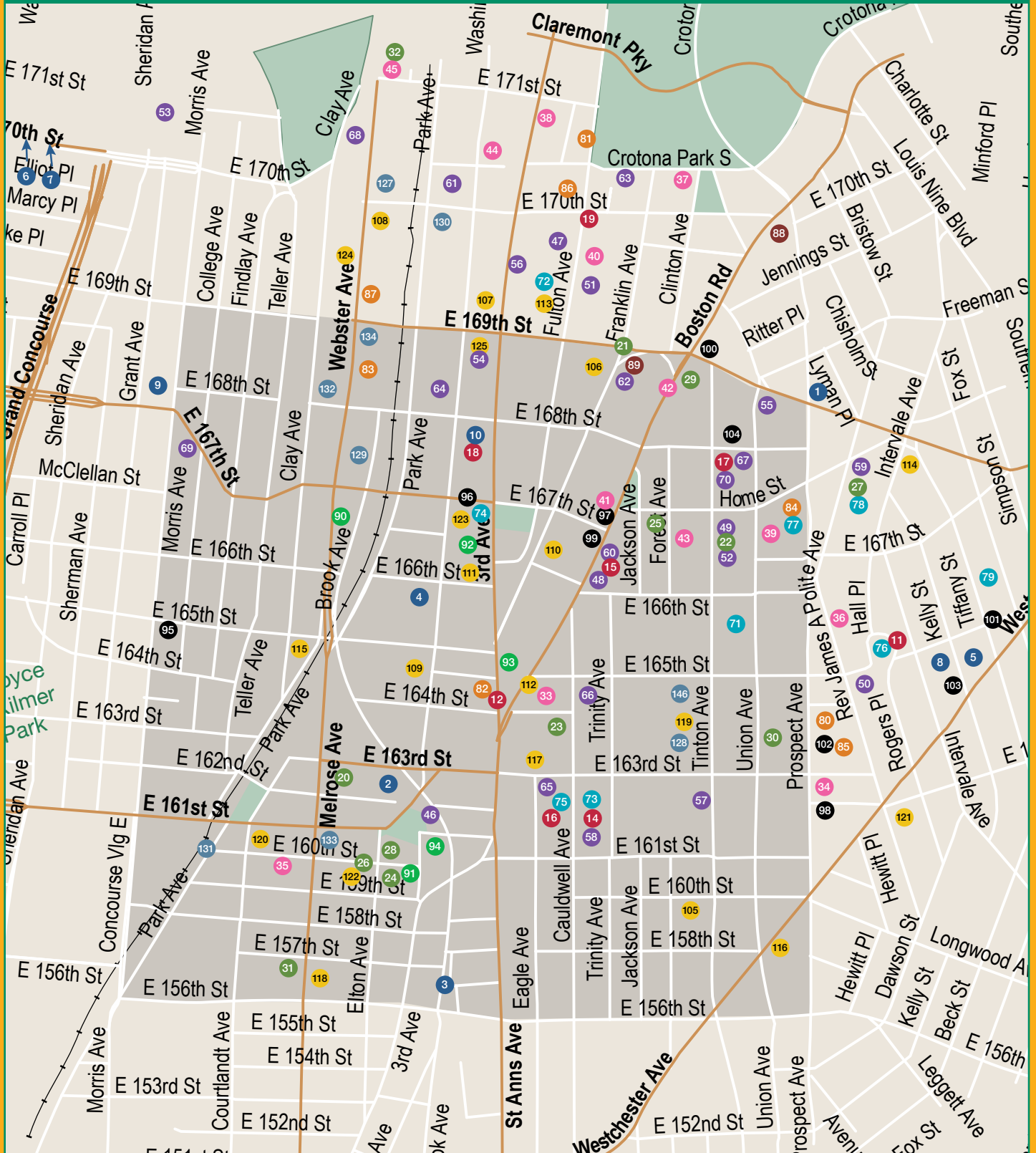
The demographic shifts throughout the five boroughs in the 1960s and 1970s of middle-income families moving out of the City in favor of the suburbs left the City with a shrinking tax base and less monetary resources to allocate towards public services. The practice of redlining—denying loans to low-income and minority communities— also contributed to neighborhood decline. More than 20,000 live-venue seats were lost, and the community and music scene were marginalized for decades after.

The South Bronx became a national symbol of urban decay as it felt the impact of dwindling public services and disinvestment. This trend continued throughout the 1980s until the City, working with neighborhood activists and community groups, began reinvesting in affordable housing to bring residents back to the area.

With increased investment in housing, Morrisania and the greater South Bronx increasingly attract more working families, local artists, and new industry. The New York Public Library's Morrisania Branch at E 169th Street serves as an anchor for community programs catering to people of all ages. Neighborhood businesses as well as diverse places of worship serve the area's African-American, African, Caribbean, Latino, and other residents. Yet, the community continues to struggle with obstacles reflective of poverty such as limited resources, minimal arts access, and scarce economic opportunity.

# CULTURAL ASSETS

CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS • PUBLIC ART • PARKS/PLAZAS/GARDENS • FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS  
• EDUCATION/CHILDCARE • PLAYGROUNDS • COMMUNITY/SENIOR CENTERS • PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS  
• RESTAURANTS/FOOD MARKETS • SMALL BUSINESSES • SOCIAL SERVICES • HOUSING



# Legend

## CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

1	Beulah Picture Gallery
2	Bronx Music Hall (opening 2020)
3	Centro Cultural Rincón Criollo/La Casita de Chema
4	DreamYard Project
5	JR Latin Music
6	Literary Freedom Project
7	Mosaic Literary Magazine
8	Natata Production
9	Nieves Latin Dance Studio
10	Renaissance Youth Center

## PUBLIC ART

11	"Big Pun" Mural
12	<i>Blue-winged Warbler</i> Mural
13	<i>Graffiti Jungle</i> Mural
14	M.S. 301 Mural
15	Mural and Garden - Morris Educational Campus
16	P.S. 140 Mural
17	P.S. 212 Playground Mural
18	R.E.M.S. Mural
19	"The Crossroads" Mural

## PARKS/PLAZAS/GARDENS

(parks shaded in green on map)

20	A. Badillo Com. Rose Garden
21	Beatty Plaza
22	Bronx Latin School Mural and Garden
23	Charlton Garden
24	Edith Garden

25	Jackson Forest Community Garden
26	Jardin de la Roca & Little Green Garden
27	Jardin Schohlbrig
28	Little Green Garden
29	McKinley Square
30	NYCHA Flower Garden
31	Rainbow Garden
32	St. Augustine Catholic Church Peace Garden

## FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS

33	Bronx Gospel Hall
34	Christ Family Community Church
35	Church Without Walls
36	Congregation Mount Horab
37	Good Will Baptist
38	Greater Holy Tabernacle Church
39	Iglesia Cristiana
40	Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses
41	New Covenant Dominion Cathedral
42	Rehoboth Church of God in Christ of NY
43	RT Hudson School of Seventh Day Adventist
44	St. Paul's Episcopal Church
45	St. Augustine Our Lady of Victory Church

## EDUCATION/CHILDCARE

46	Boricua College & Art Gallery
47	Bronx Center for Science & Mathematics
48	Bronx International High School

49	Bronx Latin School
50	Bronx Regional High School
51	Children Circle Day Care
52	Dr. Richard Izquierdo Health & Science Charter School
53	DreamYard Prep High School
54	Harriet Tubman Charter School
55	Honey Bears Family Day Care
56	I.S. 219 New Venture School
57	Jane Addams High School
58	M.S. 301
59	Metropolitan High School
60	Morris Educational Campus & Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies
61	P.S. 55
62	P.S. 63 Author's Academy
63	P.S. 110
64	P.S. 132 & Morgan Playground
65	P.S. 140 The Eagle School
66	P.S. 146
67	P.S. 212
68	P.S. 723x/927x
69	Success Academy Bronx 2 Middle School
70	Urban Scholars Community School
<b>PLAYGROUNDS</b>	
71	Behagen Playground
72	Drew Playground
73	Dunbar Playground
74	Gouverneur Playground

75	Hilton White Playground
76	Horseshoe Playground
77	NYCHA Basketball & Playground
78	Reverend Polite Playground
79	Tiffany Playground
<b>COMMUNITY/SENIOR CENTERS</b>	
80	Bronx Social Center
81	Community Action for Human Services
82	Forever Young
83	Louis A Flicking Child Development Center
84	NYCHA Davidson Community Center
85	Odyssey House
86	Phipps Neighborhoods
87	The William Hodson Senior Center
<b>PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>	
88	Bronx Community Board 3
89	Morrisania Branch Library
<b>RESTAURANTS/FOOD MARKETS</b>	
90	African Fresh Market
91	Cinco de Mayo Mexican Restaurant
92	Hall Catering
93	Lechonera Pollo Sabroso
94	Perry's Coffee Shop
<b>SMALL BUSINESSES</b>	
95	Fatima African Hair Braiding
96	Hidden Beauty Salon
97	MAH Professional African Hairbraiding
98	Martial Arts Fitness
99	My V.I.P. Spa & Nails LLC
100	Nubian Hair Studio



<b>101</b>	Patron Santiago Botanica
<b>102</b>	Rofersa Cigars
<b>103</b>	Success House of Prints
<b>104</b>	Suga on the Block Boutique
<b>SOCIAL SERVICES</b>	
<b>105</b>	Argus Community Inc.
<b>106</b>	BronxCare Health System
<b>107</b>	Claremont Neighborhood Center
<b>108</b>	Directions For Our Youth (DFOY)
<b>109</b>	FEDCAP
<b>110</b>	Franklin Avenue Armory Women's Shelter
<b>111</b>	Help Home
<b>112</b>	Morrisania Revitalization Corporation
<b>113</b>	Morrisania Sexual Health Clinic
<b>114</b>	Mothers on the Move
<b>115</b>	Neighborhood Association for Inter- Cultural Affairs
<b>116</b>	Pibly Residential Program
<b>117</b>	Save our Streets (S.O.S.)

<b>118</b>	South Bronx Action Group
<b>119</b>	South East Bronx Neighborhood Centers (SEBNC)
<b>120</b>	The Bronx Defenders
<b>121</b>	The Hopeline
<b>122</b>	The Salvation Army
<b>123</b>	Volunteers of America
<b>124</b>	Where Care Comes From
<b>125</b>	Yamica Medical Center
<b>HOUSING</b>	
<b>126</b>	Arbor House
<b>127</b>	Butler Houses (NYCHA)
<b>128</b>	Forest Houses (NYCHA)
<b>129</b>	J. Arthur Jones Arms
<b>130</b>	Morris Houses (NYCHA)
<b>131</b>	Morrisania Air Rights (NYCHA)
<b>132</b>	South Bronx Action Group
<b>133</b>	Urban REZ HDFC
<b>134</b>	Webster Houses (NYCHA)

# NEIGHBORHOOD SNAPSHOT AND DEMOGRAPHIC HIGHLIGHTS

SOURCE:  
AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY  
2014–2016, US CENSUS BUREAU

## TOTAL POPULATION

MORRISANIA	BRONX	NEW YORK CITY
<b>88,005</b>	<b>1,436,785</b>	<b>8,461,961</b>

## AGE

### MEDIAN AGE

BRONX  
**33.3**

MORRISANIA  
**30.2**

NEW YORK CITY  
**35.9**

UNDER 5 YEARS  
**8.6%**  
7.5%  
6.6%

25 TO 44 YEARS  
**26.8%**  
28.2%  
31.6%

5 TO 14 YEARS  
**16.8%**  
13.8%  
11.3%

45 TO 64 YEARS  
**22.6%**  
23.5%  
24.6%

15 TO 24 YEARS  
**16.4%**  
15.7%  
13.0%

65+ YEARS  
**8.9%**  
11.3%  
13.0%

**30.3%** OF MORRISANIA RESIDENTS  
ARE UNDER 18 YEARS OLD, AS COMPARED TO  
**25.6%** OF BRONX RESIDENTS AND **21.2%** OF NEW YORKERS

## INCOME

MEDIAN INCOME  
**\$25,895**  
\$35,302  
\$55,191

UNDER \$15,000	<b>32.7%</b> 24.9% 16.2%	\$75,000 TO \$99,999	<b>5.9%</b> 9.0% 10.9%
\$15,000 TO \$34,999	<b>28.8%</b> 14.7% 18.9%	\$100,000 TO \$149,999	<b>4.8%</b> 8.3% 13.1%
\$35,000 TO \$49,999	<b>12.1%</b> 13.3% 11.1%	\$150,000 TO \$199,999	<b>0.9%</b> 2.6% 6.1%
\$50,000 TO \$74,999	<b>13.9%</b> 15.1% 15.3%	\$200,000+	<b>0.9%</b> 1.9% 8.3%

**40% OF RESIDENTS 65 AND OVER LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE,** AS COMPARED TO **24.4%** IN THE BRONX AND **18.7%** IN NEW YORK CITY



## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

**35.1%**  
28.8%  
19.2%

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE/  
SOME COLLEGE

**44.8%**  
45.1%  
28.2%

ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE  
OR HIGHER

**20.1%**  
26.0%  
42.6%

## HOUSEHOLDS

**29,474**

HOUSEHOLDS IN MORRISANIA

**47.3%**

ARE RENT BURDENED  
(PAY 30% OR MORE OF  
INCOME IN RENT)

**19.9%**

HAVE AN INCOME  
OF LESS THAN  
\$10,000

**44.2%**

HAVE CHILDREN  
UNDER 18 YEARS

**7.7%**

18.9%  
31.7%

OF RESIDENTS OWN  
THEIR HOMES

## DISABILITY

RESIDENTS 65  
AND OVER  
WITH A DISABILITY

**50.3%**

43.1%  
36.7%

## LANGUAGE



**54.2%**

OF RESIDENTS  
OVER FIVE YEARS OLD  
SPEAK SPANISH AT HOME.

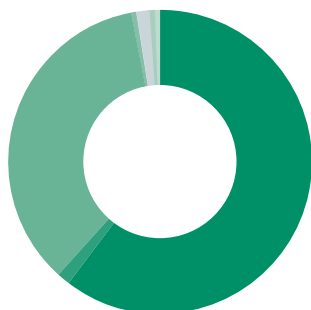
**28.7%**

OF ALL RESIDENTS  
SPEAK ENGLISH LESS  
THAN "VERY WELL."

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY  
2011-2015, US CENSUS BUREAU.

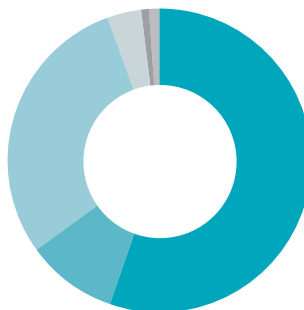
## RACE/ETHNICITY

### MORRISANIA



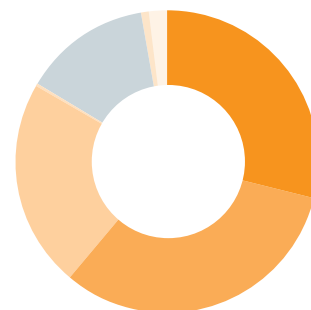
Race/Ethnicity	%
Two or More Races	0.9
Some Other Race	0.2
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0
Asian Alone	1.2
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	0.6
Black or African American Alone	35.2
White Alone	1.5
Hispanic or Latino	60.5

### BRONX



Race/Ethnicity	%
Two or More Races	1.0
Some Other Race	0.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0
Asian Alone	3.6
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	0.2
Black or African American Alone	29.5
White Alone	9.6
Hispanic or Latino	55.4

### NEW YORK CITY



Race/Ethnicity	%
Two or More Races	1.8
Some Other Race	0.9
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0
Asian Alone	13.6
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	0.2
Black or African American Alone	22.2
White Alone	32.3
Hispanic or Latino	29.0

NYC Population FactFinder <https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/#12.25/40.724/-73.9868>, retrieved June 7, 2018

# KEY FINDINGS

Census data and the research conducted for this report revealed the following:

## Forces and Trends

**Population and housing changes:** Community District 3 (CD 3), which includes Morrisania, saw a population decline of 64% between 1970–80 due to the decimation brought about by waves of arson, redlining, disinvestment, and other socio-economic forces. Efforts to reverse the trend have succeeded in part by an unprecedented increase of approximately 8,500 units of residential housing, and the preservation of an additional 9,000 units, since 1990. Today’s population has increased by 50% since 1980 but is still lower than prior to the population decline.

**Poverty:** Morrisania is part of the poorest congressional district in the country and faces many of the dynamics associated with poverty such as high rates of unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, school drop-out, and HIV/AIDS.

**Health and safety:** Neighborhood conditions and the circumstances of daily living affect community members’ well-being. CD 3 has the highest incarceration rate in the City, and ranks third in injury assault rates. It also has the highest rate of obesity and the third highest rate of adult diabetes. CD 3 ranks first in both alcohol-related and drug-related hospitalizations in the City. Moreover, the district ranks third in teen pregnancy rates and second in child asthma hospitalizations.

“At night you could hear the music pouring out onto the streets...The congas would start in the afternoon and last long into the nights.”

— former Morrisania resident

## SPOTLIGHT ON MUSIC

Morrisania's all-but-forgotten, prolific music scene began in the 1940s and flourished for over 50 years, renewing itself over the decades as venues birthed and showcased some of the period's most influential musicians performing jazz, Latin music, doo-wop, and hip-hop. After World War II, Black and Latino families began moving to Morrisania, a neighborhood with a progressively diverse and vibrant live musical culture. Jazz musicians who lived and played in the neighborhood included **Donald Byrd, Herbie Hancock, Lou Donaldson, Jimmy Owens** (all National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters) as well as **Maxine Sullivan and Valerie Capers**. One notable club, the Blue

## Strengths

**Cultural providers:** A variety of cross-sector organizations dedicated to arts and culture serve the community, providing vital services to people of all ages and backgrounds. Cross-sector institutions such as churches, health providers, and small businesses, several with established roots in the community, enhance their services by including or expanding cultural activities as part of their offerings.

**Music:** Community members speak of music pouring out of businesses, and being played in stores and bodegas, schools, parks, churches, at festivals, block parties, and on the streets. They also reference makeshift instruments and spontaneous performances. Morrisania's diversity and shifting demographics are reflected in the local music which continues to be made up of a tapestry of different influences.



Morrisania Band Project (MBP - pictured left) is an award-winning R&B soul collective started in 2016 in the Bronx. Founded by singer Elissa Carmona, MBP creates a platform for musicians to add vibrancy to the South Bronx through music, social initiatives, and community engagement.

**Local public art:** The neighborhood offers opportunities for local professional and young artists to express themselves and their communities. Public art activates otherwise underutilized spaces by converting warehouse walls and fences into community canvases. Projects such as murals enhance school building and park walls, arts centers, and firehouse and firetruck doors.

**Innovation and adaptation:** One of the community's greatest strengths is its ability to innovate and adapt. The area's legacy of artistic innovation is unquestionable. Influential musicians in the area played jazz, Latin music, doo-wop, R&B, funk, mambo, salsa, and hip-hop, reflecting residents' musical traditions. Contemporary artists like Billboard-award-winning bachata artist Romeo Santos, who attended Morris High School, are elevating and further defining the neighborhood's distinct identity. Morrisania also is and has long been home to influential visual artists working in a variety of media including street art, as well as spoken word artists from the birth of hip-hop to today. Even businesses have adapted to have multiple

Morocco, provided a setting where jazz, funk, and Latin music could fuse and spawn new combinations and where one could hear music ranging from **Jimmy Castor Bunch to Nancy Wilson.**

Latin jazz, mambo, and salsa also were part of the musical soundscape with **Mongo Santamaria, Tito Rodriguez, Ray Mantilla, Gilberto "Pulpo" Colón and Ray Barretto** making the area home as well. Popular doo wop bands such as **the Crickets, the Chords, and the Chantels** launched their careers in the neighborhood. But within two generations, the area's rapid depopulation took its toll as many live music venues closed their doors by 1975. At the same time, young people, feeling the effects of abandonment, invented a new musical form and a new generation of local innovators from the

neighborhood included one of hip hop's grandfathers: **Grandmaster Flash**, as well as **Grandwizzard Theodore** who created the technique of "scratching" and the first all-female MC and DJ group, **Mercedes Young Ladies**—they all helped to spark the hip-hop movement.

functions that serve the diverse population's cultural norms. A car wash that doubles as a café, so that locals can enjoy breakfast sandwiches, smoothies, pastelitos, and arroz con pollo while waiting for their cars to be cleaned. An autobody shop is home to a fruit stand and a pop-up clothing shop, while also serving as a safe space for roosters rescued from cockfights. Other establishments offer community members—workers, owners, customers—outdoor space where they can sit and play dominoes and music, weaving work, play, and art into the neighborhood's streets. In addition, contemporary artists, including dancers, musicians, and visual artists, many of whom still live in the borough, and loyal supporters are working to elevate the neighborhood's distinct identity.

### **Parks and gardens, courtyards and green**

**spaces:** Numerous outdoor spaces provide leisure opportunities for community members of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds. Many of these popular sites boast current and recent renovations. Several gardens have partnerships with the New York Botanical Garden, as well as host public art and community events for planting, activism, and development. 100% of residents live within one-fourth to one-half mile of a park or open space<sup>1</sup>, which is an opportunity to provide and further engage community members, especially those

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1 NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, 2016, <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/planning/walk-to-a-park>, accessed October 15, 2018

who feel they don't have access to arts and culture activities in their neighborhood, and those who would like to see more.

**Widespread entrepreneurship:** Small businesses, such as daycare centers, salons and hair-braiding businesses, international markets and pop-up stores, not only serve the community's diverse immigrant populations but also provide an entry point for employment.

## Challenges

Understanding cultural engagement levels in Morrisania, and supporting cultural engagements, present a challenge. According to the survey results:

**Defining arts and culture:** Many do not identify the various local informal activities in which they take part as “arts and culture,” although they regularly



Photo Credit: WHEDco



engage with and/or create arts and culture in their homes and in the community. Many also access culture primarily through their place of worship, or through organizations and schools in which their children are enrolled, not in an arts-specific setting.

**Lack of time:** Many survey respondents indicated that they do not engage in cultural activities at all because of long work hours.

**Local perceptions:** Community members surveyed were generally less aware of the area's historical arts and cultural resources or those presently available to the community, and had more often heard mostly negative things about the area. Instead, many said that they travel to other parts of the City to engage in formal arts activities that are not available locally, such as museums and theaters.

**Communication barriers:** Cultural providers of all types and sizes find it difficult to effectively reach the large and diverse local population. Additionally, because most community members rely on word-of-mouth for news about events and activities, it can be challenging to develop a successful, broadly-reaching, and cost-effective marketing and communications strategy.

## Opportunities

- Build an inclusive coalition of cultural stakeholders committed to leveraging existing assets and addressing shared priority issues.
- Develop effective communications strategies that consider the different languages spoken, levels of literacy, and the multiple ways locals prefer to access information, from word-of-mouth to various media formats.
- Build strategic cross-sector partnerships with local organizations and City agencies to focus on neighborhood issues and increase outreach throughout the neighborhood with diverse segments of the population.



- Increase engagement in cultural and community activities by reducing barriers to participation, and by activating underutilized public spaces, especially parks and other outdoor locations.
- Ensure that arts and culture are an essential component of community-wide development efforts.

# CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND ENGAGEMENT

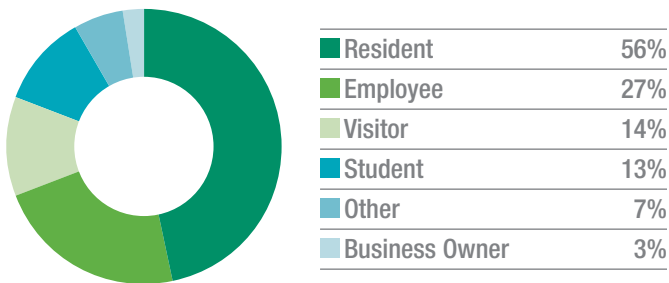
## NEIGHBORHOOD

**From April to June 2018**, the Morrisania team conducted four focus groups and two interviews. The focus groups were held with DreamYard youth, families, teaching artists, and arts providers, and with a local partner, Children’s Aid. A total of 32 people participated in the four focus groups. Additionally, 28 community members participated in a pop-up mapping project, BX Marks the Spot, led by WHEDco, to locate sites of artistic or cultural significance to them.

The next two pages include results from the Morrisania Neighborhood Arts and Culture Survey, conducted April – June 2018. The survey was completed by 469 people who live, work, go to school, or spend time within or close to the Morrisania neighborhood. Surveys were administered in English and Spanish, via street intercepts and community forums in zip codes 10451, 10456, and 10459, as well as by email and social media. The survey reached students, workers, and visitors as well as residents, with the majority living in the neighborhood.

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

### HOW DO YOU RELATE TO MORRISANIA?



### RACE/ETHNICITY



### GENDER



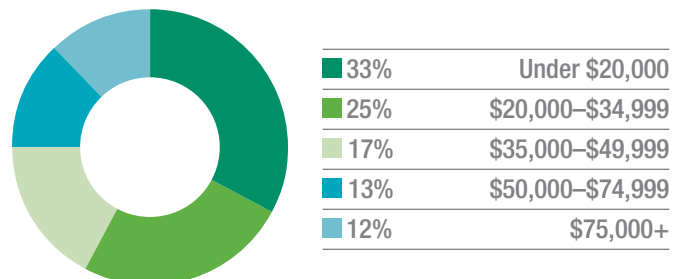
### HOUSEHOLDS



### THE LENGTH OF TIME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CONNECTED TO MORRISANIA IS FAIRLY DISTRIBUTED

ABOUT **1/3** OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CONNECTED TO THE AREA FOR **1–5 YEARS**, WITH OVER **1/4** CONNECTED TO THE AREA FOR **MORE THAN 15 YEARS**.

### INCOME



# ARTS AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

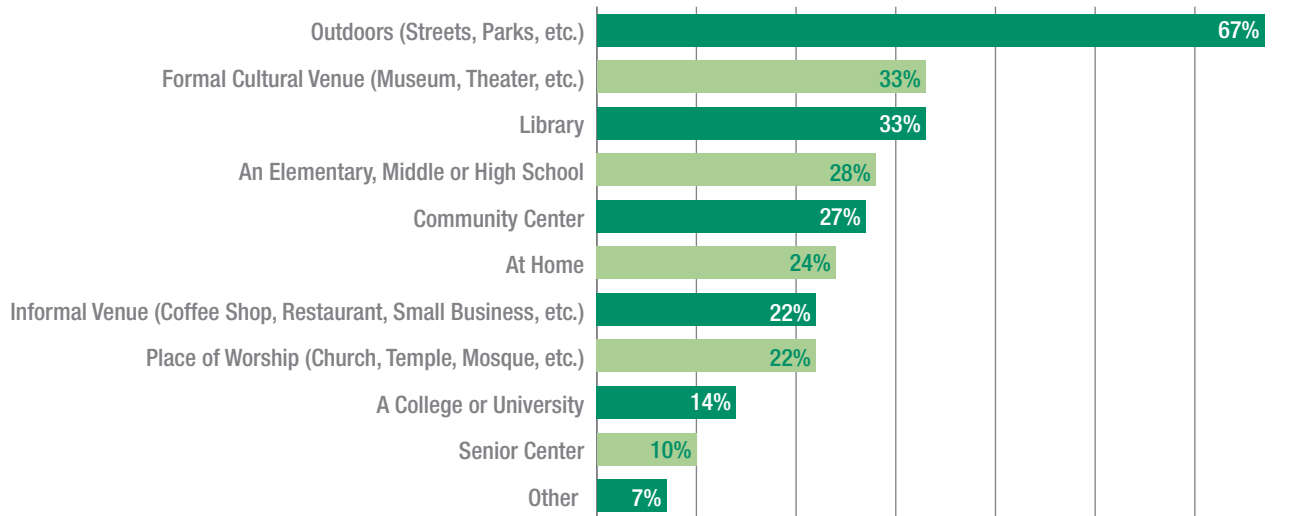
## IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS HAVE YOU...

(check all that apply.)



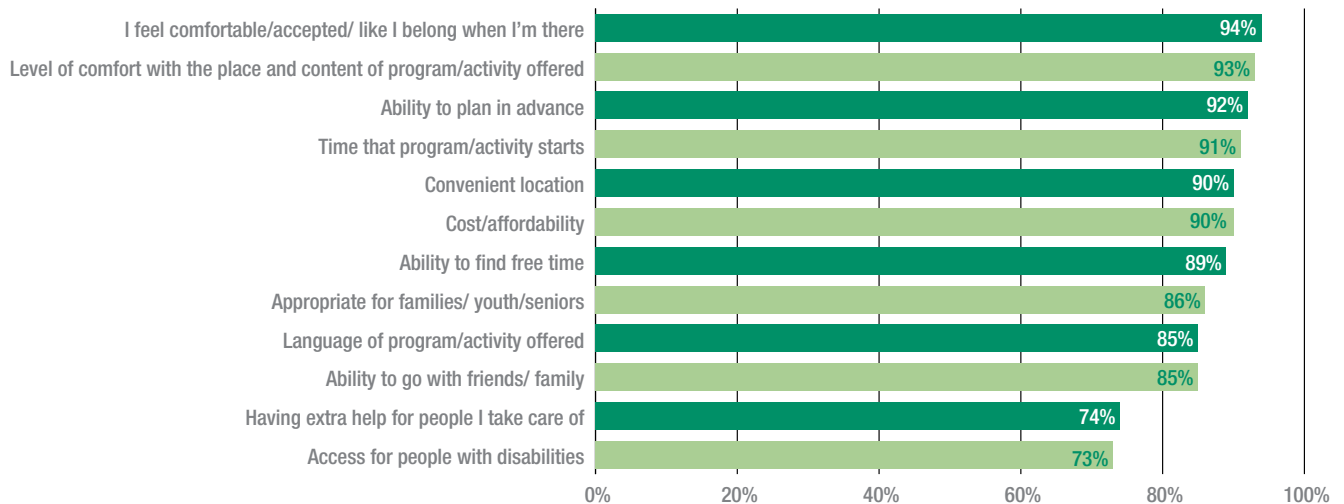
## WHERE HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN ARTS AND CULTURE?

(check all that apply.)



## DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PREVENT YOU FROM PARTICIPATING IN ARTS AND CULTURE IN MORRISANIA?

(check all that apply.)

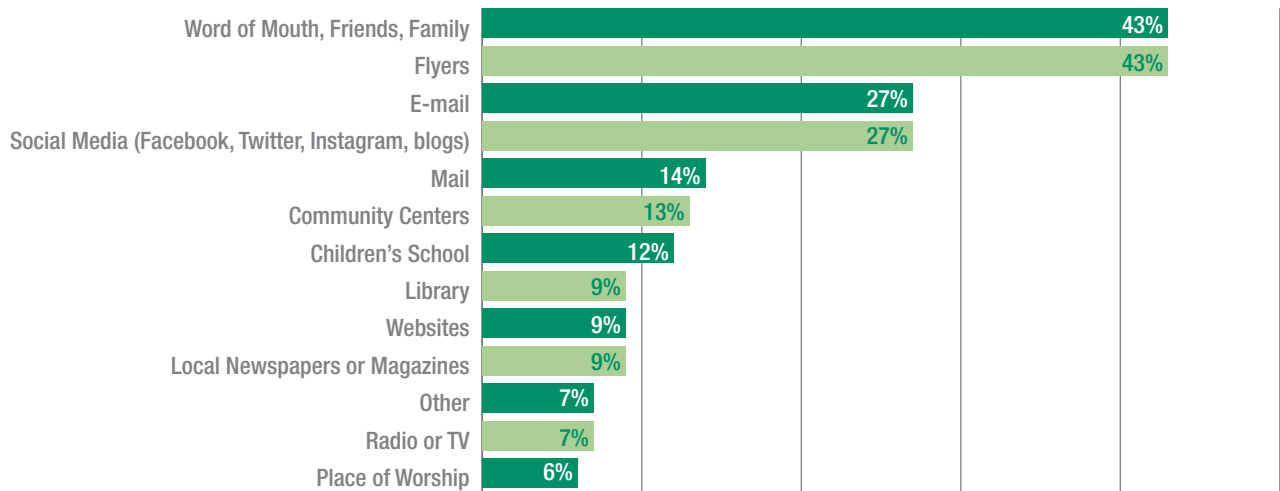


# CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND ENGAGEMENT

## COMMUNICATION

### HOW DO YOU HEAR ABOUT CULTURAL EVENTS IN MORRISANIA?

(check all that apply.)



## COMMUNICATION

### WORD OF MOUTH

52%

NONFAMILY HOUSEHOLDS

41%

FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS



OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS LEARN ABOUT CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FROM WEBSITES, TV, AND/OR RADIO.

## COMMUNITY ISSUES

### PLEASE MARK THE COMMUNITY ISSUES THAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU.

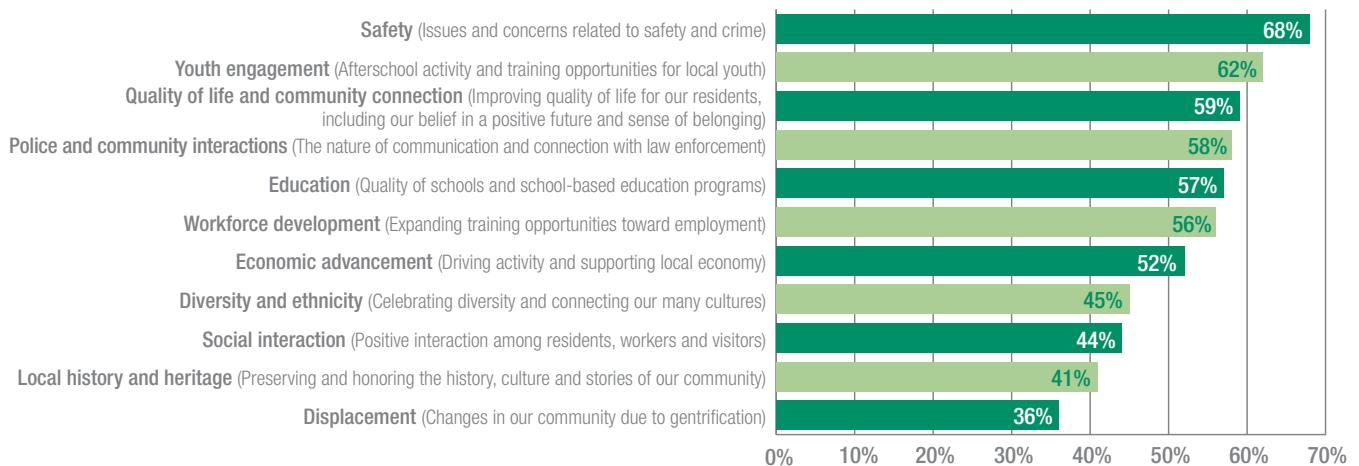




Photo Credit: WHEDco



Photo Credit: Jared Gruenwald

# INSIGHTS

The research uncovered a large volume and variety of informal cultural activity by non-arts-specific entities. Findings show that relationships among cross-sector players can be important in bringing about cultural opportunities. The report's cultural asset list presents potential new networks for outreach and collaborations. And along with the survey data, it can help all cultural providers understand the dynamics and circumstances that can help develop opportunities for cultural engagement.

**Space and Networking:** There is a need for youth to gather informally and to share creative work, such as at DreamYard's HERE-TO-HERE youth-operated café. A lack of local creative spaces steers youth to congregate at make-shift spots such as fast food restaurants.

**Serving Adults:** Adults often do not feel as comfortable as youth when trying new experiences. Some who have little or no experience attending a formal arts venue expressed feeling intimidated, or that they do not belong at such places. New approaches, such as intergenerational activities, can help more individuals enjoy such activities by engaging in them with friends, neighbors, and family.

“I used to love [block parties]. They would have food and music and games for everyone. We should have more block parties all the time.”

— **Morrisania resident**

**History and Pride:** Community members of all ages are surprised by the area's rich cultural and artistic history, and in particular by the many noted musicians and artists that have come from the South Bronx. Reestablishing a shared awareness of this impressive history could help foster community pride and refute negative perceptions of what has been and what could be.

**Cross-Neighborhood Collaboration:**

Several organizations located outside of Morrisania’s borders, such as The Point CDC and Casita Maria, provide vital services to the local community as well as beneficial opportunities for a cross-fertilization of people, activities, and ideas.

The Bronx Community District 3’s *Statements of Community District Needs and Community Board Budget Requests (Fiscal Year 2019)* indicates that the three most pressing issues facing CB 3 are: health care services, unemployment, and youth and children’s services. Priority requests include capital improvements and increased services to the Morrisania Library, City parks, gardens, and playgrounds, senior centers, and a NYCHA community center. All of these public facilities have partnered with or hosted cultural activity over the years, providing benefit to the public at large. Of note is a recent study on the social value of the arts in New York City’s neighborhoods. Findings show that “the presence of cultural resources in a neighborhood has a significant positive impact on a neighborhood’s health, the outcomes of its schools, and its crime rate.” The arts are a valuable community asset that can help address social issues, provide employment, and may improve physical health and social well-being.





## LOCAL POETRY

### Untitled...

Rec room baby showers and  
first birthdays  
that wound themselves through the day  
and spun themselves into night  
like summer sunshine  
because “el pari no pare  
sigue y sigue”  
girls in frilled dresses  
twirling to music  
and thick frosted sugary cakes  
with strings of candy-coated pearls  
and trays that your mom made

of pastelitos and moro and ensalada  
de papa  
and the smell of chicharrón next to  
paper-wrapped  
slices of limón  
spills into the hall  
like the bass of the music  
that dances out the window  
into the courtyard  
at the building where your tía lives  
and your abuela too  
and the primo



that nobody knows how he's  
your primo  
but a friend from forever  
and other tías and other abuelos  
and primos  
in other buildings  
tenements like gift boxes  
and little boys and little girls  
riding tricycles down paths  
and somebody's mom watching  
from the window  
and neighbors on the stoop  
catching sun and all the scoop  
And down the street  
driving through the maze of double  
parked cars

and mechanic shops squeezed  
tight together  
and riding down the sidewalk in reverse  
to get out of the spot that's  
been blocked  
and before that  
passing rows of empty lots  
brick buildings with windows blown out  
like missing teeth  
scraggy grass poking through concrete  
and yellow dandelion faces  
smiling between cracks and  
speckled glass  
among the weeds grown to my knees  
and the beauty of forgotten stories

— Elizabeth Leonard, daughter of  
Morrisania resident 2018

## Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC)

was founded in 2010 by WHEDco. Its mission embraces the arts as a catalyst for social, economic, and cultural renewal in communities ravaged by disinvestment. Informed by the area's rich musical history and its residents, the BMHC works to restore pride of place, reverse stereotypes, empower citizens, and improve neighborhoods through arts access. The BMHC was born out of community memory of



## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

The following examples represent Morrisania's diverse array of culture-affirming community assets, past and present:

**NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA):** With 16 public housing communities in the Study Area, NYCHA plays a major role not only in providing housing for the community but also in offering sites of play, leisure, and organizing.

**Urban Reservation:** In 2007 residents of 400 E 161st Street purchased their Housing Development Fund Corporation (HDFC) building, and formed Urban Reservation, a cooperative in which Cherokee residents can live without fear of displacement as well as showcase their Native American traditions to the community via local events and block parties.

**Bronx Culture Collective (BxCC):** A network of over 15 cultural and community development groups committed to preserving and amplifying the cultural legacy of the South Bronx.

**Morris High School Historic District:** Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1983, the district includes 51 buildings

including Morris High School, two streets of brick row houses, and Trinity Episcopal Church of Morrisania.

**Clay Avenue Historic District:** Designated in 1994, the district encompasses 32 residential buildings between E 165th and E 166th Streets. 28 sites are beautiful two-family semi-detached residences. In 2016, New York City’s Historic District Council identified the district as one that merits preservation, naming it one of “Six to Celebrate.”

**McKinley Square Theater:** Once served the Bronx’s Yiddish-speaking population. Yiddish theater was centered around satirical sketches and acts, some referencing the lives of Jews still in Europe. By the time it was torn down in 2002, the Theater had long transformed into a Latin music venue called the Royal Mansion, reflecting the changing neighborhood.

**The Black Door:** In the mid-1970s, soon after DJ Kool Herc had begun spinning records in the Sedgwick Avenue Rec Room, Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five began gigging at a small, new underground venue called “The Black Door.” It was a safe haven, near the

the tremendous cultural and musical history of the Bronx, and seeks to ensure that this extraordinary legacy—and its broad influence on the American and worldwide music scenes—is preserved, promoted, honored, and shared.

WHEDco’s newest development, Bronx Commons, a permanent home for the BMHC, which is now housed in a Lab space. Bronx Commons will not only provide 305 units of deeply affordable housing but also will boast state-of-the-art sustainability features, recreational and open space, and places to eat and shop, all anchored by the **Bronx Music Hall**, a new music venue with 250 seats, a gallery, and arts-based community center.



## Renaissance Youth Center

Renaissance Youth Center’s mission is to empower at-risk inner city youth to fully maximize their potential as productive and responsible members of society, by offering dynamic, team-building education, music, and sports programs, while instilling the importance of building strong communities.

While the primary focus is teaching youth new skills, they also place strong emphasis in developing their social skills. They achieve this by mentoring youth, interacting with their families, getting involved in their educational goals, and engaging them in positive activities that support teamwork and community-building.

schoolyards and abandoned buildings where Flash and his crew had won fans. “Lines used to stretch around the block” and “...we’d be opening the doors at 4 in the morning getting cursed out. ‘Flash, I’ve been standing out here forever tryin’ to get in!’”

**Engine Company 41:** Engine Company 41 originally opened in 1874 at Third Avenue four years after the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) was officially established. In 1903, Engine 41 moved to its current location at 330 East 150th Street, where it was critical to fighting the devastating fires of the 1970s. The surrounding community, recognizing its significance, successfully advocated for then Mayor Ed Koch to reopen the firehouse after closing it in 1988. Now, as in the past, Squad 41 protects Morrisania, Melrose and several neighborhoods in the Bronx and Northern Manhattan.

**63 Park:** Located at 1260 Franklin Avenue, P.S. 63 Park occupied a massive yard behind the public school that was eventually used as a major venue to support the burgeoning hip-hop movement in the Bronx. Grand Wizzard Theodore, an early hip-hop innovator credited

with inventing scratching (the rubbing of a record to a beat by a D.J., the squeaky sound of which has become associated with rap), once told an interviewer that the first time he ever “got on the turntables” in public was at 63 Park.



Photo Credit: WHEDCo

“It was about 4pm and I was on my way home from school, I saw a group of people, around middle age, some possibly younger, playing some Spanish music and simply jamming out to it. Usually I see this happen quite often, but this time, they weren’t the only ones there. There were children, women, men, of different colors, and it was just beautiful to me. A community was what I saw, and each time I see things like that, I just feel the need to make art.”

— DreamYard student

## Spotlight On DreamYard

DreamYard, founded in 1994, is a Bronx-based organization that uses the arts, social justice pedagogy and digital and connected learning to inspire youth, public schools and communities. DreamYard's year-long arts programs develop artistic voice, nurture young peoples' desire to make change and cultivate the skills necessary to reach positive goals. By committing to sustained learning opportunities along an educational pathway, with 55 public schools K-12th Grade, partnering with DY Prep HS School and at the DreamYard Art Center in Morrisania, DreamYard supports young people as they work toward higher learning, meaningful careers and social action. DreamYard's work, particularly through the lens of social justice, is transformative and necessary for young people, families, artists and teaching artists themselves.

“I remember the men outside playing loud music – usually salsa – and playing dominoes. They would bring out a table and chairs and gather around. Usually it was men, but sometimes the women would get in there and join too. I remember them slamming the dominoes down on the table and the arguments about the game and about politics, you know, *burlándose uno de otro.*”

— former Morrisania resident



Photo Credit: David Flores

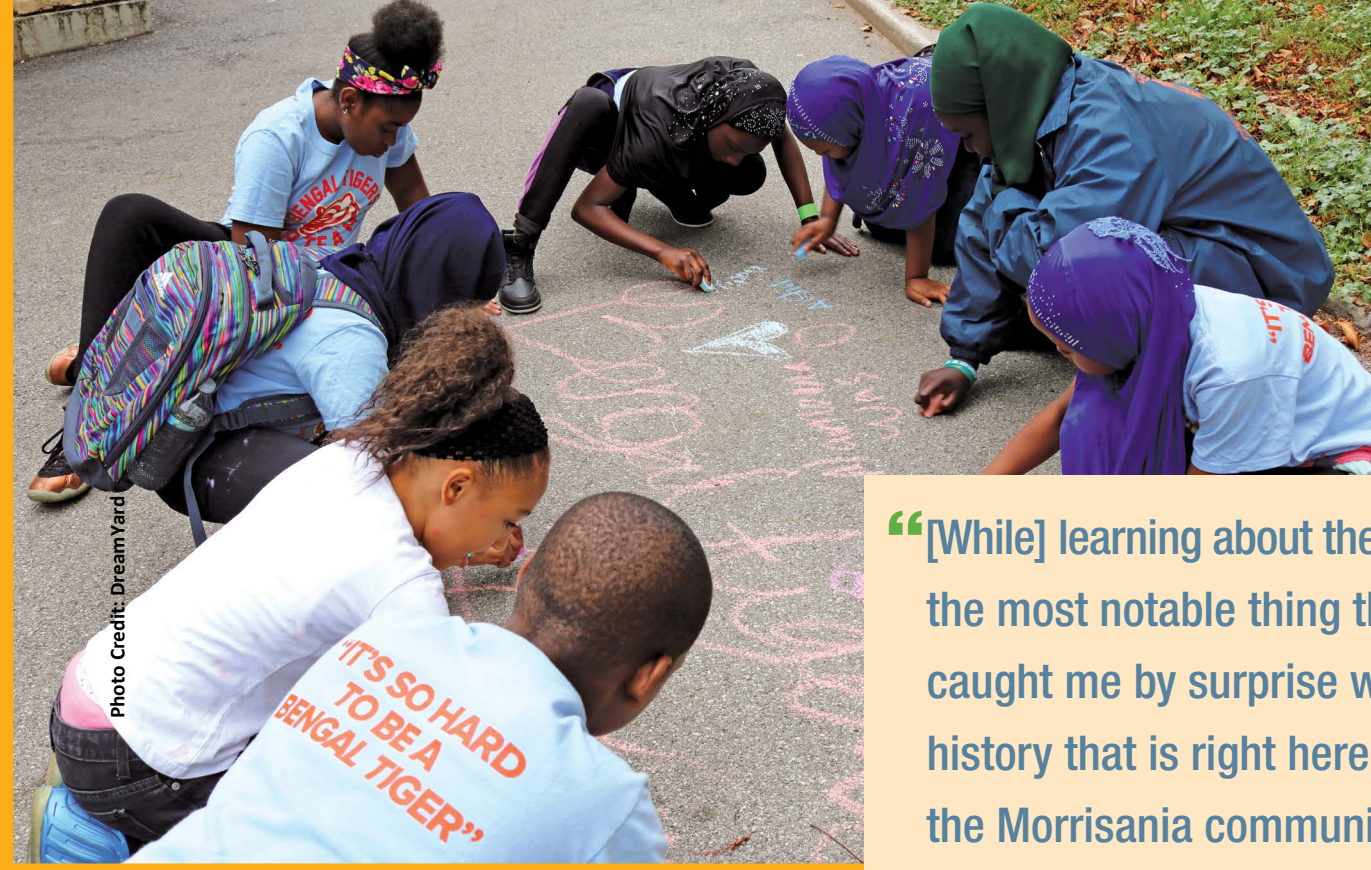


Photo Credit: DreamYard

“[While] learning about the Bronx... the most notable thing that caught me by surprise was all the history that is right here within the Morrisania community... I can sincerely vouch that there are so many great things in the community and even better things to come! However, it is very important to educate and continue to promote the accessible resources in the community and to also advocate to the locals in our area...”

— Morrisania resident

## RECENT AND UPCOMING COMMUNITY PLANNING EFFORTS

- NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative 2018, NYC Economic Development Corporation
- NYC Neighborhood Activation Study 2017, Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, Department of Design and Construction, and New York Police Department
- NYC Sustainable Communities 2012, Department of City Planning
- NYC South Bronx Initiative 2006, NYC Economic Development Corporation
- 3-K for All, 2019–2020, NYC Department of Education



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*Data gathering included community surveys, in-person interviews, focus group discussions with arts professionals and community residents, as well as a comprehensive mapping of cultural assets.*



## **Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco):**

WHEDco is a community development organization founded on the radically simple idea that all people deserve healthy, vibrant communities. WHEDco’s mission is to give the South Bronx access to all the resources that create thriving neighborhoods: from high-quality early education and after-school programs, to fresh, healthy food, cultural programming, and economic opportunity. In 2019, WHEDco will open Bronx Commons and the onsite Bronx Music Hall in Morrisania, WHEDco’s third and most ambitious mixed use affordable housing development. Key project staff: Sammi Gay (former), Amarfis Olivares, Yesmín Vega, Belissa Rivas, Nicole Lavan, and Kerry A. McLean.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



**DreamYard Project, Inc. (DreamYard):** Established in 1994, DreamYard collaborates with Bronx youth, families and schools to build pathways to equity and opportunity through the arts. DreamYard impacts over 10,000 young people, by using the arts, digital tools, and social justice to transform students, schools, and communities. DreamYard works in the heart of Morrisania, just three blocks from WHEDco’s Bronx Commons development under construction. Key project staff: Tim Lord, Elizabeth Leonard, and Crystal Tirado.



Data analysis and research support provided by **Webb Management Services (WMS)**. WMS is a research and planning practice dedicated to advancing the arts and culture. Founded in 1997, the firm supports preservation, development, and delivery within the arts and cultural sector with sound planning, research and consulting services that lead to cultural and community development. Webb Management Services has worked on more than 400 projects for governments, arts organizations, educational institutions, and other related entities across North America.

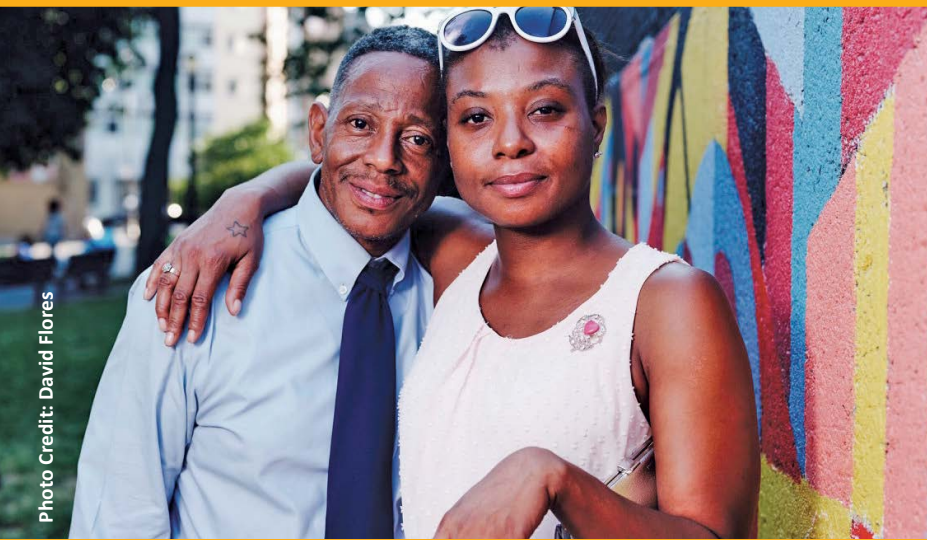


Photo Credit: David Flores



Photo Credit: David Flores



Photo Credit: DreamYard



Photo Credit: E.B. Gallardo

**The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)** is dedicated to supporting and strengthening New York City’s vibrant cultural life. DCLA works to promote and advocate for quality arts programming and to articulate the contribution made by the cultural community to the City’s vitality. The Department represents and serves nonprofit cultural organizations involved in the visual, literary, and performing arts; public-oriented science and humanities institutions including zoos, botanical gardens, and historic and preservation societies; and creative artists at all skill levels who live and work within the City’s five boroughs. DCLA also provides donated materials for arts programs offered by the public schools and cultural and social service groups, and commissions permanent works of public art at City-funded construction projects throughout the five boroughs. For more information visit [www.nyc.gov/culture](http://www.nyc.gov/culture).

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