



# East Side House's Impact

East Side House is Breaking New Ground in the Bronx! Accessible and inspiring, the Haven Hub will be a place where the Bronx gathers to grow stronger together. It is more than a building – it is a promise: to build with, not for, the community.

East Side House Settlement isn't just about support; it's a sanctuary of growth and empowerment. As we mark the East Side House's 135th year, we proudly share the stories of three extraordinary individuals – living proof of the transformative power within our programs. The profiles that follow continue this story of possibility – of Bronx youth building brighter futures with guidance, opportunity, and belief.

# Breaking Ground in the Bronx

## A New Era of Community Wellbeing

### Haven Hub

In 2026, a transformative landmark will rise in the Bronx – the Haven Hub, a multi-use facility representing a new chapter in East Side House’s 135-year legacy of empowerment. Built to accompany the newly opened Haven Charter High School, the Hub will welcome more than 500 youth and community members annually for recreational use, as well as various programs and events. The centrally located gymnasium will host basketball tournaments, dance showcases, health workshops, and neighborhood celebrations, all with the goal of creating a vibrant space for movement, connection, and belonging.

The need is urgent – only one in three Bronx residents lives near an accessible fitness space, and nearly 40% of Bronx children face health challenges. Studies show that safe, accessible recreation improves health, reduces crime, and strengthens community ties. Addressing this demand, Haven Hub will promote active lifestyles and holistic wellbeing through inclusive, year-round programming. Moreover, the Hub’s promotion of wellness, creativity, and community engagement will complement the academic and career-focused training at Haven Charter High School, where each year 400 students are prepared to graduate with diplomas and healthcare certifications.

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## Harry Montas

After losing momentum in his first high school, Harry Montas transferred to Bronx Haven High School (an ESH partner school), where he was introduced to East Side House Settlement and – when he filled in for a missing camera technician in a school play – the visual language of photography. At the Bronx Documentary Center, he honed his storytelling, learning to understand the moment, emotion, and humanity within each frame. East Side House recognized his passion and continually created space for him to grow, experiment, and return, even when life pulled him away from the craft. “It wasn’t one moment,” he says. “It was a series of moments that made me realize East Side House believed in me. They always welcomed me back with open arms.”

Harry’s work now defines much of East Side House’s visual legacy, from graduation videos to documenting the Student Ambassadors’ international trips. He has captured some of the most emotionally powerful milestones in the organization’s history, including students returning home from overseas, who are often moved to tears by their experience. “I cry with them,” he admits. “For kids like us, opportunities like this are once in a lifetime.”

On top of photography, Harry is also working at a hospital and pursuing a career in law enforcement. He sees deep connections between his roles. “People want to be heard,” he says. “And in both photography and law enforcement, you step into someone’s life for a moment and witness their story.”

“East Side House showed me that if there’s even a drop of hope, anything is possible,” he says.

*Images in this section were photographed  
by Harry Montas*



“EAST SIDE HOUSE WAS. . . A VILLAGE THAT SHOWED ME NO ONE ACHIEVES GREATNESS ALONE.”

– FOLA ARULEBA

## Fola Aruleba

Mercy Folaoluyinka Aruleba, known as “Fola,” grew up in the Bronx, the daughter of Nigerian immigrants who taught her that resilience, family, and community were the foundation of opportunity. Those values took shape when she became involved with East Side House.

In high school, her first job – as a student leader – came through East Side House. By guiding classmates through college and financial aid applications, she learned about responsibility and the benefits of helping others succeed. In her senior year, she was invited to join the Student Ambassador program, and in 2018, she proudly represented East Side House at The Winter Show’s Opening Night Party. Immersed in art from around the world and stepping into her first networking experience, she discovered how confidence grows when opportunity meets preparation. At 18 years old, she

traveled on her first international trip to the United Kingdom, France, and Italy through East Side House’s Ambassador Program. For Fola, experiencing new cultures enabled her to affirm her place in a global story. She often recalls a proverb that framed her journey: *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.* For Fola, East Side House was that “together,” a village that showed her no one achieves greatness alone.

She is also the founder of *FlyWithFola*, a travel company inspired by her first trip abroad and dedicated to making international travel accessible, curated, and empowering for those eager to explore the world. From the Bronx to Europe, and anywhere else, her journey embodies resilience, leadership, and gratitude.



**“EAST SIDE HOUSE GIVES YOU MORE THAN PROGRAMS – IT GIVES YOU PURPOSE.”**

–JANZEL TOBAL

## Janzel Tobal

For 14-year-old Janzel Tobal, creativity is more than a hobby – it is a guiding way of seeing the world. The Bronx native, son of Dominican-born parents and one of five siblings, had long demonstrated interest in drawing, animation, piano, and theater, pursuits which require effective programming to develop skills and enhance creativity.

Those programs were not always easy to find. Like many young people in the Bronx, Janzel’s opportunities were shaped by the resources around him. Through East Side House, he discovered not only opportunities that kindled his interest, but also a supportive community that nurtured his talents and gave him the confidence to grow.

Janzel first enrolled in the SONYC after-school program at the Urban Institute for Mathematics. He entered the ESH after-school program seeking a safe place. Instead, he found an anchor – a community of peers, mentors, and educators who inspired him to take on new challenges.

That foundation led to his selection as an East Side House Student Ambassador, bringing him to Washington, D.C., where he explored cultural institutions, historic landmarks, and his own aspirations. Now a freshman at Haven Charter High School, Janzel is inspired by his teachers and energized by the opportunities ahead. “East Side House gives you more than programs – it gives you purpose,” he reflects.

“Thank you for having Janzel represent Haven and East Side House,” his mother shares. “You are building our future doctors and professionals.”

