



## LANGUAGE & MUSIC SERVICES

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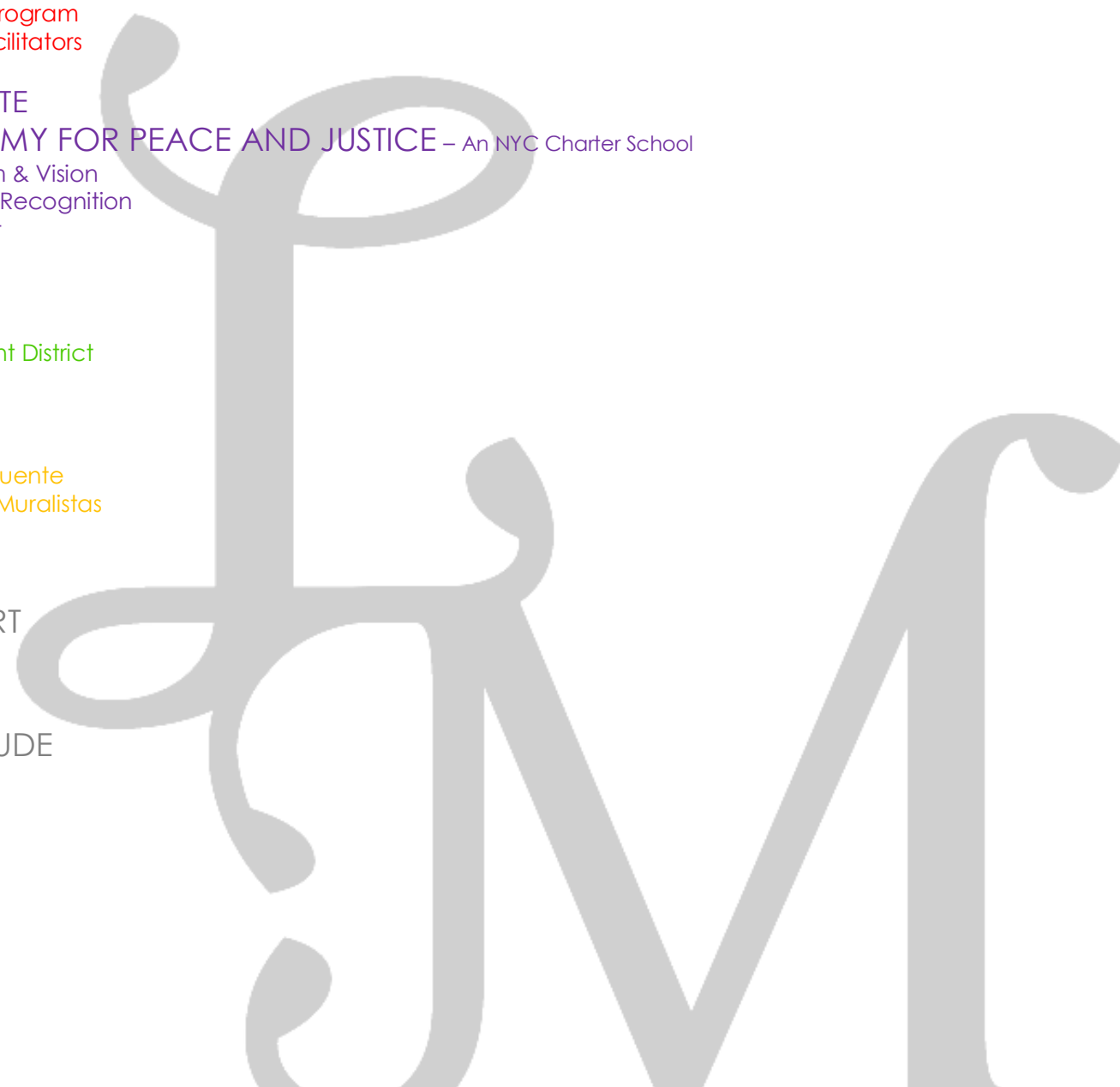
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# EL PUENTE

## MAKING PEACE ATTAINABLE

Founded in 1982, El Puente is a community initiative that harnesses the energy and efforts of the diverse peoples of Brooklyn, bringing forward their pre-existing power to self-determine their individual and collective condition, at home, in their communities and in the world. The organization connects community members through their involvement with any or all of the four main divisions: the [Leadership Division](#), the [Academy for Peace and Justice](#) (a New York City Charter School), the [Community Health and Environment Institute \(CHE\)](#) and the [Center for Arts and Culture \(CAC\)](#). While each division has its unique focus and goals, member-leaders and Academy students are nurtured within an integrated, holistic program that draws from all four divisions, developing a well-rounded social awareness that prompts action and expression. True peace is the natural result of justice, and true justice can only be made possible by comprehension and compassion. We believe that individuals who are just can constitute nothing but a just community, and just communities will thus amount to a just and peaceful world.

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## ROOTS

We anchor

When Luis Garden Acosta came back to Williamsburg in 1979, the area was consumed by violence, hopelessness and apathy. Gang wars ruled the street, and in less than one year, 48 youths were killed in the cross fire. Abandoned or forgotten by the City of New York, the area had an outdated turn-of-the-century hospital with subpar services and an emergency response group used to going out to pick up the dead.

Trained in public health, familiar with uphill struggle from his former years as a Young Lord, and comfortably charismatic from his former position as a prominent radio figure, Luis Garden Acosta led a coalition team in closing down these poor services and establishing humane and adequate facilities to serve the forlorn neighborhood. The question in his head was never whether or not one could achieve acceptable treatment and conditions for the people of Williamsburg. The question was why had it not been done before.

Garden Acosta and professional dancer and lifetime educator Frances Lucerna looked at the situation through different lenses yet saw the same thing: Williamsburg consisted of a group of disconnected individuals that did not form a cohesive community. Without proper education and a sense of belonging, people found themselves lost, without a sense of self, purpose or direction. Lack of community resulted in lack of communication, and thus repressed desire for expression. But the potential for community is *always* there.

“We did not come to serve anyone,” says Garden Acosta. “We showed people what they are capable of doing themselves.”

It could be argued that a group of professionals and leaders headed by Garden Acosta and Lucerna organized a community “oasis” to address the issues at hand, including education and violence. But what Garden Acosta, Lucerna and a team now including Eugenio Maldonado really organized was what Lucerna calls a “catalyst”: a physical meeting place so that a group of individuals could connect, learn, communicate and express, thus becoming a community.

The effort was given the name of EL PUENTE (“The Bridge,” in Spanish), alluding to both the physical presence of the nearby Williamsburg Bridge, and to the foremost purpose of the effort itself: connection.

“When people make a connection, they have the opportunity to express themselves to each other; they find common ground, and they discover the latent power that has been within them all along...it is just more evident in the coming together of many.” – Frances Lucerna

From the initial days in an abandoned church building, El Puente has developed into an all-encompassing initiative led by the community for the community, empowering individuals through a holistic approach rooted in four indelible principles: creation of community; fomentation of love and empathy; pursuit of peace and justice; and exercise of the right to mastery.

## People

Luis Garden Acosta  
Founder/President & CEO

Luis Garden Acosta is a national leader in the struggle for human rights through community building. Since 1982, when he founded El Puente in his home community of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Luis has led the organization as a beacon for holistic learning and leadership development, inextricably tied to the quest for peace and justice.

The path that led Luis to El Puente wound through institutions such as St. Mary's Seminary, Harvard Medical School, and New York City's Office of the Mayor, with work in fields as diverse as public health, music, welfare rights, radio and television.

In addition to his work at El Puente, Luis has contributed his leadership to organizations such as the National Science Foundation, the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, New Yorkers for Parks, Citizens Union, The New York City Food Bank, the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, and the Young Lords Party. He also initiated and leads CAFÉ, the Community Alliance for the Environment. Luis assisted in the writing of the Surgeon General's Report on Public Health and Self-Help, and has guided programs for organizations such as the Center for Children and Technology, The California Wellness Foundation and the National Network for Youth. He continually works to nurture and inspire other community organizations across the nation and around the world.

Luis has been recognized with awards including the "Spirit of the City" from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Public Works Award, and "Celebrating Success" from the Children's Defense Fund. In 1998, Luis and his partner, Frances Lucerna, were honored with the Heinz Award for the Human Condition.

Frances Lucerna

Executive Director & Founding Principal of El Puente Academy for Peace & Justice

For over two decades, Frances Lucerna has been a pioneer in community arts and education. Frances founded the Williamsburg Arts and Cultural Center for Youth, Williamsburg's first arts organization, in 1980; in 1982, this became the cornerstone of El Puente's celebrated arts program. She later served as Founding Principal of El Puente Academy for Peace & Justice.

A professional dancer for 13 years, Frances holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education and Dance from Hunter College and Masters of Arts in Education and Supervision from Bank Street College. In addition to her work at El Puente, Frances has nurtured three professional dance and drama companies comprising former El Puente students, and has produced and presented the talent of local and international artists to the community. She has served on a panel for the New York State Council on the Arts; the Advisory Committee to the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities; the Community School Task Force for the White House Conference on Character Building for a Democratic, Civil Society; the board of 651, An Arts Center; and the Community/Youth Development Guide Team of the National Network for Youth. Her many honors have included the "Celebrating Success" award from the Children's Defense Fund, the Brooklyn Council on the Arts Arts Advocate Award and the 1998 Heinz Award for the Human Condition.

Eugenio Maldonado

Chief of Operations

Eugenio (Gino) Maldonado is a proud native of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and has dedicated much of his life to the improvement of his community. Gino has been part of the leadership team of El Puente since its inception in 1982, and has served as Chief of Operations since 1994. He holds a bachelors degree from Queens College.

Outside of his work at El Puente, Gino has also led the battle for fair housing for the Latino community in Williamsburg. He is a founding board member of Beginning With Children, a local charter school created by parents and community leaders for elementary and intermediate education. Mr. Maldonado is affiliated with the NYC Employment and Training Coalition, an advocacy group for youth employment and training; the Williamsburg Legal Services Advisory Committee; and the Williamsburg Coordinating Committee, an activist group dedicated to organizing community efforts for fair housing, environmental justice and education reform.

## Accomplishments

- 2008: Academy for Peace and Justice highlighted in the Eisenhower Foundation report, “What Works: Public School Reform.”
- XXXX: CHE receives NYS Governor’s Decade of the Child Award for leading the state in childhood immunization campaigns.
- XXXX: CHE receives NYC Department of Health’s Excellence in Public Health Award.
- XXXX: CHE co-founds the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA).
- XXXX: CHE Elders launch the reforestation of Bushwick and Williamsburg initiative, helping advocate for the renovation of existing parks and creating a new, New York City Department of Parks waterfront park (Grand St. Park), with the support of the Parks Council (now New Yorkers for Parks).
- 2003: Academy for Peace and Justice recognized by the Department of Education’s Chancellor as one of New York City’s 208 Schools of Excellence.
- 1999: CHE becomes first community organization to publish a scientific article in the *American Journal of Public Health*.
- XXXX: Espiritu Tierra Community Garden founded.
- XXXX: CHE becomes the only federally-funded, Latino-community-driven, environmental-justice organization in New York City.
- 1999: CAC honored with the Presidential Committee on Arts and Humanities & National Endowment for the Arts Coming Up Taller Award as one of the ten leading arts institutions for young people in the United States.
- 1997: Establishment of Teatro El Puente, the first and longest-running adolescent AIDS drama group in New York State.
- 1993: First community organization in New York State to create a public school.
- 1992: CHE creates and leads the Community Alliance for the Environment (CAFÉ), which teamed with United Jewish Organizations (UJO) and the New York Public Interest Research Groups (NYPIRG) to defeat the development of a 55-story incinerator.

## Distinguished Members

### **Andrew "Lemon" Andersen**

Starred in *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway, which won the Tony Award for Best Special Theatrical Event (2003)

### **Suheir Hammad**

Americorps Alumna of El Puente; award-winner writer and poet; original cast member and writer of *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway, which won the Tony Award for Best Special Theatrical Event (2003)

### **Wilson Jermaine Herreira**

Received the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical for his role in *RENT* (1996)

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# LEADERSHIP

We inspire

Leadership is the axis of change. Our Leadership Centers offer guidance, nurturing, counseling and training for people of all ages, in conjunction with projects led by CHE and CAC. Originally focused academically on children and young adolescents, the Leadership Division has now launched the Scholars Program, aimed at late teens seeking to reach their full capacity as productive members of our community and the world.

## Centers

All of our centers offer all programs for children, teenagers and adults of all ages. By becoming a member-leader you have the freedom to visit any center at any time and get involved with the community.

Programs are Monday – Friday, 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

### Williamsburg

#### Headquarters

211 South 4th Street - Brooklyn, NY 11211  
Tel: 718-387-0404

#### MS 50 Beacon Center

183 S. 3rd Street - Brooklyn, NY 11211  
Tel: 718-486-3936

#### Taylor-Wythe Community Center

80 Clymer Street - Brooklyn, NY 11211  
[PHONE NUMBER]

### Bushwick

#### Bushwick Center

311 Central Avenue - Brooklyn, NY 11221  
Tel: 718-452-0404

## Scholars Program

The new El Puente Scholars Program for late teens offers more intensive mentoring and academic support through a year-long program. Please call or visit El Puente's headquarters for more information.

## Staff & Facilitators

### HEADQUARTERS

William Orellana, Program Director  
Nikaury Acosta, Dance Facilitator  
Hector Arias, Video Facilitator (EPTV)  
Jona Burton, Academic Support Facilitator  
Sasha Dobos-Czarnocha, Drama Facilitator  
Francisco Negrón, Sports Facilitator  
Andrew Rodriguez, Assistant Sport Facilitator  
Carlos Rosello, Band Facilitator

### TAYLOR-WYTHE

[INSERT LIST]

### BUSHWICK

Asenhat Gomez, Program Director  
Piper Anderson, Drama Facilitator  
Crystal Bruno, Arts Facilitator  
Michael Caban, Dance Facilitator  
Katy Jaquez, Membership Facilitator  
Yessica Marrero, Receptionist  
Leslie Martinez, HIP Facilitator  
Pedro Polanco, Technology Facilitator  
Katuska Cabral, Tutor  
Fediana Camilo, Tutor  
Johnson Nazaire, Tutor

MS 50 BEACON

Helen Colon, Program Co-Director

Ignacio Espinal, Co-Director

Manuel Cuzco, Group Leader

Saiida Hodges, Group Leader

Joemin Issac, Group Leader

Rosa Piedra, Group Leader

Jo-Anne Romero, Group Leader

Richard Scott, Group Leader

Vanessa Caamano-Gonzalez, Dance Facilitator

Alfred Cervantes, Arts Facilitator

Damien Cruz, Hip Hop Facilitator

Cecilia Ledesma, Cultural Drama Facilitator

Arkadius Lesniak, Hip-Hop Facilitator

Francisco Negrón, Recreational Facilitator

Clara Waloff, Fine Arts Facilitator

Kelvin Aragon, Group Worker

Yudelka Corporan, Group Worker

Nathaniel Grana, Group Worker

Jomyra Nieves, Group Worker

Andrea Villegas, Group Worker

Alexandria Medina, Homework Helper

Elaine Almonte, Tutor

Jeanette Arias, Tutor

Neisha Hamilton, Tutor

Jahaira Rodriguez, Program Aide

Matilde Garcia, Safety Officer

Angela Soler, Safety Officer



## EL PUENTE

### ACADEMY FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE – An NYC Charter School

We forge

Established in 1993 and currently providing only high-school level education, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is the first school ever founded to focus on human rights and social justice. It is El Puente's most profound act of revolution: a reconstruction of the notion of what a school is, and how education is conceived and achieved.

#### Curriculum & Vision

Founded on the principles of holism, the Academy for Peace and Justice operates under an integrated program that promotes collective exploration and learning through the guidance of facilitators, rather than conforming to the standardized scheme of one-directional knowledge impartment. Students are led through community-focused projects and nurtured within an environment shaped and based on respect and communication rituals. The yearly experiences are designed to answer the following leading questions:

**9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Grades: "Who am I?"** – Curriculum explores students' culture and roots.

**11<sup>th</sup> Grade: "Who am I in community?"** – Curriculum explores students' role in their local community.

**12<sup>th</sup> Grade: "Who am I in the world?"** – Curriculum explores students' and community's roles in the global society.

Among the differences that one can expect to find in the Academy's ways are the following:

***No security guards; no checks; no lockers:***

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice operates under the principle of respect. Kids can leave their stuff anywhere, and everyone is expected to respect all property and one another.

***Rituals and town hall meetings:***

We foment communication, initiating our students in the proper ways of solving conflict and expressing opinions.

***Community projects:***

The real world needs initiative and organization. Our school involves students with real issues and gives them the tools to develop and execute action plans.

The school is not an oasis outside of the world. It is a catalyst for change in the world. Providing context and purpose, the Academy forges young minds to help create men and women concerned and invested in their well-being and prosperity as a result of the well-being and prosperity of all.

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is a New York City Charter School and thus complies with all New York City, New York State and US Federal standards of education.

#### Awards & Recognition

2008: Highlighted in the Eisenhower Foundation report, "What Works: Public School Reform."

2003: Recognized by the Department of Education's Chancellor as one of New York City's 208 Schools of Excellence.



## Enrollment

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is open for students at high-school level, grades 9 through 12. For information about enrollment and to visit the school, please call or come by:

250 Hooper Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11211  
(718) 387-1125  
Hours of Operation: 8:00 a.m. — 4:00 p.m.  
[www.elpuente.us/academy](http://www.elpuente.us/academy)

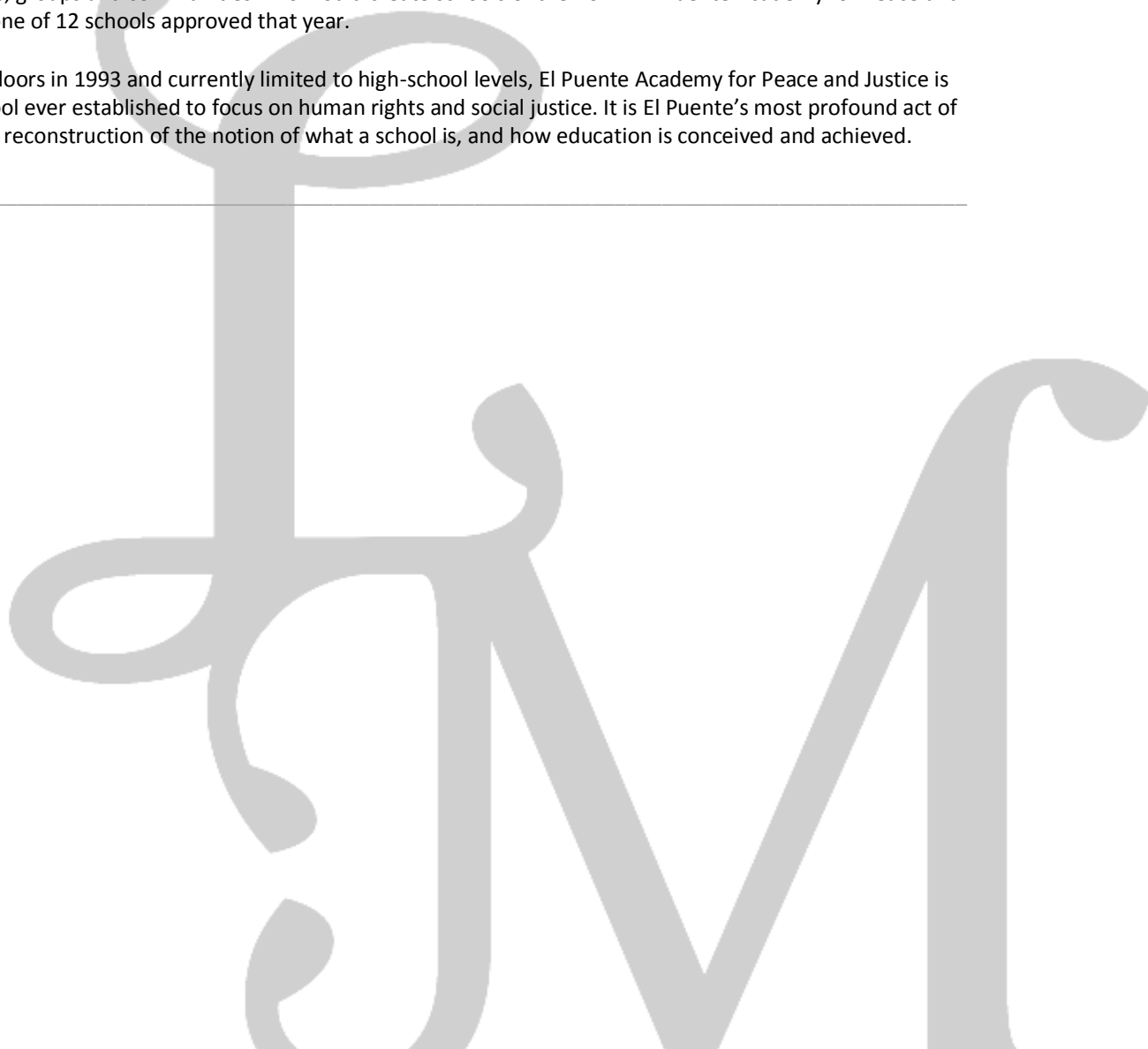
## Story

In a 1990 youth conference at the UN as part of the Decade of the Child, a young man from El Puente stated, “There are special schools for arts, and science, and technology—why isn’t there a school that teaches about peace?” and just like that, he planted the seed of what the Academy for Peace and Justice is today.

El Puente jumped at the opportunity to realize this young man’s dream when, in 1992, as part of an initiative to improve public education in New York City, the Department of Education and New Visions for Public Schools invited this and other organizations to submit their proposals for a new school. The City aimed to provide support to individuals, groups and communities who would create schools of their own. El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice was one of 12 schools approved that year.

Opening its doors in 1993 and currently limited to high-school levels, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is the first school ever established to focus on human rights and social justice. It is El Puente’s most profound act of revolution: a reconstruction of the notion of what a school is, and how education is conceived and achieved.

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## CHE

We transform

Rooted in El Puente's ideology of collective self-help and self-determination, the Community Health and Environment Institute (CHE) employs an indigenous-led approach to health—one that acknowledges the community's wellbeing in the context of science, values and traditions. CHE reaches out into the community to collectively address its needs holistically and engage its members in a variety of projects that address issues of community health and environmental justice. Among the current programs are Promotoras de Salud, CHE Activistas, the Community Health Advocates and the Green Light District, a new initiative to bring the different peoples of Williamsburg together on issues that concern all.

### Green Light District

CHE's newest initiative was born out of the rapid change that Williamsburg has seen in recent years. The neighborhood has become a mix of many cultures, including people who have been there for generations and newcomers. The Green Light District has pinpointed issues that concern all, and will use these same issues to bring people together.

CHE leaders went out into the community and identified 5 areas of importance to this part of Williamsburg:

Affordable housing  
Health  
Education  
Arts and Culture  
Greening Spaces

The next step is to create a Sustainability Action Plan. The Green Light District initiative will launch on September 18, 2011.

### Story

Launched in 1997, El Puente's Community Health and Environment Institute (CHE) was implemented to carry out community scientific research, enable organization and promote wellness. The only federally-funded, Latino-community-driven, environmental-justice organization in New York City, CHE develops and launches initiatives to identify and handle immediate and long-term community needs. Through the years, CHE has organized several sub-groups, including the CHE Activistas, Promotoras de Salud, and the Community Health Advocates (CHA), all of which are active or inactive as needed.

#### Accomplishments

- 1999: Directed a three-year epidemiological survey on asthma netting valuable scientific findings that led to El Puente becoming the first community organization to publish a scientific article in the *American Journal of Public Health*.
- 1997: Establishment of Teatro El Puente, the first and longest-running adolescent AIDS drama group in New York State.
- 1992: Creates and leads the Community Alliance for the Environment (CAFÉ), which teamed with United Jewish Organizations (UJO) and the New York Public Interest Research Groups (NYPIRG) to defeat the development of a 55-story incinerator.
- XXXX: Receives NYS Governor's Decade of the Child Award for leading the state in childhood immunization campaigns.
- XXXX: Receives NYC Department of Health's Excellence in Public Health Award.
- XXXX: Co-founds the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA).

- XXXX: CHE Elders launch the reforestation of Bushwick and Williamsburg initiative, helping advocate for the renovation of existing parks and creating a new, New York City Department of Parks waterfront park (Grand St. Park), with the support of the Parks Council (now New Yorkers for Parks).
- XXXX: Espiritu Tierra Community Garden: designed and built by the young members of El Puente Earth Spirit (with the Parks Council's help) over a three-year period. The initiative took a "two-story high" garbage dump and transformed it into a beautiful meditative, music and medicinal herb garden.
- XXXX: Becomes the only federally-funded, Latino-community-driven, environmental-justice organization in New York City.
- 



## CAC

We enact

The Center for Arts and Culture is at the core of El Puente's principles of expression and power of self-determination. Through development within dance, music, visual arts, theatre and martial arts, students of the Academy and member-leaders are presented with the tools to free their voices and collective energy as a catalyst for social change. We enact and represent through art, and exercise our right to mastery of our craft, while exploring our culture, and immediate and global situations.

Programs include dance, drama, voice, percussion, media arts, visual arts, graphic design and hip-hop, and are led by professional staff artists. CAC also hosts three resident youth art companies: Teatro El Puente, El Puente Muralistas and El Puente Television (EPTV).

### Teatro El Puente

Founded in 1987 as an artistic initiative by the CHE Institute, Teatro El Puente is the first and longest-running adolescent drama group in New York State focused on the topic of HIV/AIDS. Its works explore and foment the development of skills to deal with this and other on-going life issues, such as relationships; conflict and violence; sexual health; and other physical, mental, and social well-being problems and situations pertaining to individuals and communities. El Puente Theatre is one of the clearest examples of El Puente's commitment to holistic integration within all its divisions: it is informed by CHE, produced by CAC and hosted by the Academy's stage.

Teatro El Puente presents over 75 performances on a yearly basis throughout the tri-state area.

### El Puente Muralistas

Under the leadership of artist Joe Matunis, the Muralistas have created over eight community murals in more than a decade of embellishing the community with the colors, shapes and sentiments of the diverse people of Brooklyn. The world is our canvas.

### EPTV

El Puente Television involves youth and the community in creating videos and documentaries that serve to record our story and inform people of current issues. We record and disseminate the people's voice and culture.

### Story

The cornerstone of El Puente Center for Arts and Culture is the Williamsburg Arts and Culture Council for Youth (WACCY), Williamsburg's first arts organization, founded by Frances Lucerna in 1980. In 1985, Lucerna, who had become El Puente's Artistic Director, folded WACCY into El Puente. Joining forces with Johnny Colon and utilizing the resources of his East Harlem Music School, she began the development of what would become Brooklyn's most comprehensive Latino pre-professional training arts center. All arts disciplines at El Puente have always strived for excellence and mastery.

### Accomplishments

El Puente Dance Ensemble has performed at important venues and events, such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Dance Theater Workshop, Prospect Park's Celebrate Brooklyn concert series and The United Nations Summit for Children.

Three Tony Awards among our members, staff and alumni.

- 1999: Honored with the Presidential Committee on Arts and Humanities & National Endowment for the Arts Coming Up Taller Award as one of the ten leading arts institutions for young people in the United States.
- 1997: EPTV creates *En la factoría*, documenting the oral history of sweatshop workers in the community, screened at the Museum of Natural History and the Urban Visionary Film Festival in New York City.
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## SUPPORT

Make a change in the lives of others and make a change in yourself.

### Donate

El Puente is a registered 501(c)(3) organization which could not subsist without the generous support of our loyal friends. Please consider donating a service, goods, or making a tax-deductible donation. The power of many to change the world is made up of individuals like you.

### Volunteer

El Puente is open to all, and we welcome any skill or knowledge that you can share with the community. Please let us know how you would like to get involved.

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## GRATITUDE

We wish to thank all the individuals, businesses and foundations that believe in the power of the people to shape their world. Together, we make change happen.

[INSERT LIST OF DONORS]

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