

Camp Cada Paso

Proposal for East Harlem

Health and Climate Justice

Updated Summer 2022

Written by

Adriana Candia

Yesenia Candia

Estefani Molina

Katering Molina

Carmen Muñoz-Medrano

Alexis Navarro

Danny Navarro

Melody Turner

Sheyla Zakashansky

Editor

Dr. Cappy Collins

<http://cadapaso.us>

<http://nullarycare.com>

Outline

- **Introduction**
- **Overview of Camp Cada Paso**
- **The Problem**
- **Personal Anecdotes**
- **Our Data**
 - **Air Quality**
 - **Noise Quality**
 - **Water Quality**
 - **Climate Change**
 - **Built Environment**
- **Our Solutions**
 - **Community Café**
 - **Trees**
- **Themes**
 - **Wealth Inequality**
 - **Housing inequality (gentrification)**
 - **Marginalization**
- **A Heritage of Activism! (Young Lords)**

INTRODUCTION

We require a major social, political, and economic shift toward an equitable and sustainable future. Changes begin small, creating a ripple effect to inspire collective action and coalitions among communities, by engaging in activism efforts and proposing policies for the betterment of these communities. Take East Harlem, a residential community, primarily with Black and Brown folks, facing a multitude of issues ranging from environmental racism to food insecurity to gentrification. These issues have persisted for decades becoming detrimental to our health and quality of life, however, there have been radical groups such as the Young Lords Party, who campaigned for the improvement of health access and services for the people of East Harlem, the South Bronx, and elsewhere. So just like those before us, our organization Camp Cada Paso (CCP), educates the youth about these concerns plaguing our community and how to advocate for change.

OVERVIEW OF CAMP CADA PASO

Our camp was founded to mobilize local partnerships and eradicate the cycle of health and wealth disparities East Harlem faces. We're focused on creating a positive youth development (PYD) framework to promote a safe and structured environment, present positive role models, inspire learning, and establish a sense of community. We want answers to the questions: why does East Harlem confront some of the worst health and achievement outcomes in NYC? How can we fix these problems? Our camp explores East Harlem by walking and sometimes biking around the neighborhood to identify the problems we see, the resources already available, and solutions we can propose to our local government representative. We divide up the four weeks of our summer camp to learn about air quality, water quality, climate change, and health justice, to understand their impacts on East Harlem. The ideas and solutions we came up with incorporate models such as upstream/downstream, logic models, and needs assessments that the campers were taught throughout the weeks to investigate their community and become agents of change. The following are ideas compiled by our campers, counselors, and adult family members who participated in the program this year.

PERSONAL ANECDOTES

We wanted to highlight individuals, our youth counselors from CCP, to give their perspective on growing up in East Harlem to grasp the health problems we deal with.



Carmen, 20

Being raised in East Harlem has been challenging. I was born with asthma, a chronic health condition that affects my lungs. When I was younger, I became easily symptomatic when exposed to polluted air such as diesel exhaust and second-hand smoke. I never understood why my chest would tighten or why I would feel lightheaded but due to the heavy traffic occurring at all hours of the day and the exhaust being released from these vehicles up and down the avenues of East Harlem, my health deteriorated. These underlying factors contributing to my well-being were only brought to light by participating in programs such as CCP, where I've learned why my community has faced discriminatory practices and policies impacting their health and health outcomes. I only hope to keep educating myself about these issues and reiterate the message through collective action to my peers and policymakers.



Danny, 19

When I was younger, I used to go out to the park more often and go for more walks, and even though I still do those things, there is a vast difference from then to now. Growing up in East Harlem made me see how my neighborhood was changing little by little and how it was getting worse over the years. The massive rent increase made me

see more homeless at the park beaches. The crimes increased as the weather did. Seeing the place where you felt the safest, I was no longer safe. If we are unsustainable, East Harlem will only worsen for our future generations to live what we experienced growing up.



Adriana, 19

Born and raised in East Harlem, I was lucky enough to be occupied in various programs that expanded my extracurriculars, hobbies, and interests. My mother's concern for our education and developing our interests gave me many opportunities and memories where I was able to enjoy my childhood in activities ranging from dance, art, music, and after-school programs. Many of these free programs are still available but some are very selective in school grades, zip codes, or recommendations so not everyone has the same access to these programs. It also took a while to find programs for us but this didn't stop my mom from asking around for programs in East Harlem. I want future generations to have better opportunities to explore their personal ambitions without being waitlisted or stopped in our neighborhood.

THE PROBLEM



Did you know there is a 9-year difference in life expectancy between the residents who live in East Harlem compared to those who live in the Upper East Side? For some context, the Upper East Side ends on 96th street while East Harlem begins on 96th street going up north towards 125th street, so as soon as you cross over you can already notice the visible consequences of the health inequities we suffer from

1 Map of East Harlem and Upper East Side neighborhoods, New York City. Horowitz, Carol & Ives, Brett. (2012). Think Locally, Act Locally, Extend Globally: Diabetes Prevention Through Partnerships with Local Communities. 10.1007/978-1-4614-3314-9_13.

Data from the Community Health Profiles 2018 report, not only validates this alarming statistic but elaborates on the contributing factors negatively impacting the health of neighborhoods like East Harlem.^{1,2} For the elderly, statistics show that 13% of East Harlem's residents are 65 years or older, in comparison, the Upper East Side statistics reveal that 20% of the Upper East Side residents are 65 or older. That means 7% more elderly! To put this into perspective, there are roughly 28,877 more residents over the age of 65 in the UES, which just alludes to the idea that we don't live to get as old and wise as the Upper East Side. In terms of social and economic conditions, neighborhoods with a high poverty rate have fewer resources like access to affordable food and housing and education, and tend to be sicker. In the UES, 7% of residents live in poverty compared to EH residents with a poverty rate of 23%. Another contributing factor to the social and economic well-being of neighborhoods is community violence and crime rate. With regards to non-fatal assault hospitalizations per 100,000 people, UES has a lower rate compared to EH, 15 vs. 130 people respectively. Additionally, incarceration rates per 100,000 adults ages 16 and older among these two communities were 71 vs. 1,291 respectively. The housing and neighborhood conditions of these two neighborhoods show how the environment can impact how easy or difficult living in New York City is. Air pollution is one of the

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-mn11.pdf>

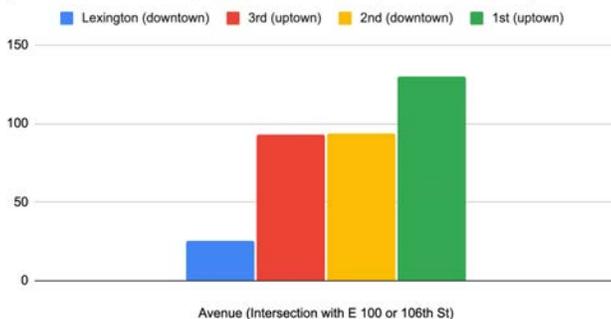
² <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-mn8.pdf>

topics we educate our campers about since healthy air is essential and lowers the risks of diseases. Comparatively, UES has a slightly higher rate of harmful air pollutants (PM 2.5) 9.1 micrograms per cubic meter while EH's rate is 8.2 micrograms per cubic meter. This report gave an extensive review of other factors whether maternal and child health, healthy living, health care and so much more, emphasizing the countless factors contributing to positive health outcomes and a higher quality of life. However, the conditions listed above adequately highlight the health disparities the residents of East Harlem face, as well as, contribute to our curriculum for the summer. We want to educate our campers about the data that is already known and how we can further analyze these conditions to find a solution. Our life expectancy shouldn't differ based on our zip codes, an equitable way of living should be attainable regardless of our societal and environmental factors measuring our worth.

OUR DATA:

Air Quality

Diesel Traffic Count by Avenue in East Harlem
(15 minute intervals, cumulative samples 2018-2022)



The first week we focused on air quality, an issue of much concern for East Harlem. As we know, diesel trucks pass through East Harlem to dispose of trash in the South Bronx. So as a group, we did yearly traffic counts for about 15 minutes along 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and Lexington Avenues. Cumulatively, we observed that 1st Ave had the greatest amount, with 130 trucks, and Lexington had the lowest, 25 trucks. These trucks are harmful to everyone, including children, in these areas. The health issues include high rates of asthma and other breathing issues

compared to the rest of NYC. This is a disparity.

Noise Quality

Noise is also a type of pollution, in a city like ours there is a significant amount of noise. Sounds at high volume can contribute to hearing loss and affect mental health, and even cause high blood pressure, so we decided to test the sounds in different locations around East Harlem. With the guidance of Luz Guel, we measured how many decibels (dB), the unit of measure for sound, were in Thomas Jefferson Park. The normal range of sound is between 30 dB-85 dB, so any sound above 85dB for prolonged periods of time can damage your ears. In some places, such as streets, there are high decibel sounds that are harmful. We also measured the sound decibels in a park, and we concluded that there is less sound with more trees. Trees act as barriers that can deflect and refract sound waves decreasing the amount of sound in the area.



Water Quality

In our second week of camp we discussed water quality, specifically the East River in this case. 60% of New York City, including East Harlem, uses a combined sewer system.³ This system of pipes and tunnels takes our sewage straight to the sewage treatment plant but this system, like many, has its limits. With climate change progressively worsening there is more rain and thunderstorms. Our sewer system is built to handle sewage and the occasional drizzle, but not storms recently pouring into our sewer system. When our sewer system overflows the outfall pipe is opened, inconveniently letting sewage mixed with rainwater straight into the East River. This is the main reason high levels of E. Coli, a bacterium, can be found in the river. It's true that we don't swim in this water, but when the climate worsens East Harlem will be the first to flood with dirty contaminated water. This is a problem but a possible solution is bioswales. Bioswales are intended to absorb runoff stormwater and have already been incorporated in many parts of the city such as the Gowanus Canal down in Brooklyn!⁴ Bioswales don't have to be complicated, even a collection of trees can serve as a bioswale. It can be simple and decrease the amount of sewage getting released into our East River, there are solutions to this.

Climate Change

The rise in global temperatures has meant an even greater need for trees. During the recent heat waves, we measured the temperatures across the city and compared areas in the direct sun versus areas under tree coverage. We found the trees have the ability to bring down temperatures by 5, 10 even 25°F! In one example the temperature on the sunny side of Fifth Avenue was 91°, the shady side lined with trees along Central Park was a mere 78°. We saw a clear gradient in the Herb Garden community garden where unshaded sidewalk was 101°F, the garden gravel path ranged between 87-91°F, and the garden beds were a cool 82°F. On the unshaded sidewalk outside Councilmember Diana Ayala's office the thermometer reached such a high temperature, it broke and only read "High"! Once it was finally able to read numbers again we saw 121°F while placing it in the meager shade of a single small tree dropped the temperature down to 87°F! Adding heat onto the already mounting problems of East Harlem can bring people over the edge. As we learned, it can lead to more gun violence, poor mental health, and more deaths of the elderly (strain on their hearts). This is alongside the common knowledge that trees absorb CO₂ in our polluted atmosphere. More trees would make the added heat brought on by climate change more bearable, as well as lessen the CO₂ in the atmosphere.



³<https://www.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/combined-sewer-overflows.page#:~:text=About%2060%25%20of%20New%20York,to%20a%20wastewater%20treatment%20plant.>

⁴ https://gowanuscanalconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Bioswales-in-NYC_extra-small.pdf



Built Environment (Franklin Plaza v. Jefferson)

Through the analysis of different aspects of neighborhood housing options in East Harlem, we compared two NYCHA housing complexes, Jefferson Houses and Franklin Plaza located between 2nd and 3rd Avenues on 115th street and 108th street respectively. We used an assessment tool designed by Professor John Sharp from Parsons School of Design who has worked with us over the years. We went around the neighborhood, looking and mapping our built environment and writing things we observed along with things that we would like in other public spaces. We noted the number of people in the area, playgrounds, trees, tables, and benches, and how they were utilized. After mapping, counting, and observing each location for a designated time, we came together to discuss the similarities and differences between each location. Some notable things that we found missing were the lack of water fountains and bathrooms in both locations. Franklin Plaza was cleaner, utilized more and well maintained compared to the Jefferson Houses. Dog feces, garbage and insecurity at Jefferson Houses are some noticeable aspects of the space that do not make it a desirable place to spend time. Regardless of more play areas at Jefferson Houses, it did not have the same ambiance to that of Franklin Plaza and lacked many things. Despite both being NYCHA housing, there are drastic differences in both locations that set them apart and can be felt by people passing through.

OUR SOLUTIONS



Community Café

This aspect of our camp was successfully piloted this past summer. We wanted to incorporate the parents since we believe children can not become champions of change unless their families are also supported. Pioneered by Dr. Louis Hernandez and Angela Donadelle, the community café provided team-building activities, visiting a credit union to open accounts, and learning about employment opportunities.

On the first day of camp, we had the parents fill out a needs assessment to understand the concerns they had and figure out who we could refer them to in the community to alleviate these issues. Some of these needs we were able to bring to the camp by

hosting guest speakers from other local community organizations such as Little Sisters of the Assumption, our school district liaison, and the Harlem Empowerment Project. Dr. Hernandez wanted to empower the parents to acknowledge the real choices they can make to control their lives. Despite the prejudice and discrimination our parents suffered, we wanted them to understand the possibilities they have to eliminate the stress induced by these factors. If the parents don't have a healthy environment to surround themselves with, how can we expect their children to succeed?



More Trees!

Throughout this proposal, evidence and personal anecdotes have been compiled to reveal that trees are our solution. Trees have been linked to improving noise, air, and water quality, combating the urban heat index (UHI), and boosting our quality of life. We found our solution, planting more trees and preserving and incorporating new green spaces for the betterment of EH's residents and improving our health outcomes, can reverse the impact these policies have had. By making this change, we hope to bring ourselves a step closer to a healthier and more equitable community. ¡PALENTE!

Work Cited:

1. 1 Map of East Harlem and Upper East Side neighborhoods, New York City: Horowitz, Carol & Ives, Brett. (2012). Think Locally, Act Locally, Extend Globally: Diabetes Prevention Through Partnerships with Local Communities. 10.1007/978-1-4614-3314-9_13.
2. Community Health Profiles- UES:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-mn8.pdf>
3. Community Health Profiles- EH:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-mn11.pdf>

Extra Stuff

I. HEADLINE! - Danny

What do you want to say to the world?

The economy divides us into three categories. High class. Middle class. Lower class. Our current lives and futures, one of these categories we fall under, and our health and environment. You may complain about the homeless you see in the corner begging for some change and think, “why don't they go somewhere else?.” The truth is they might not have anywhere to go. However, this always happens; there is a chance they could have been in the next ten years. You see, gentrification doesn't happen overnight. If you wonder, gentrification replaces the old with the new without looking back. You might love the buildings and skyscrapers downtown, but can you imagine a place like that big your home? Not to mention the massive increase of rent you will be paying with the same amount of income you make, and you most likely won't be able to pay it. Although this is interesting, sadly, this is one of many problems we suffer in East Harlem. If you want a better life for yourself and your family, stick around to learn more about what is going on in your environment and how you can help change it.

II. What are some of the differences between East Harlem and the Upper East Side (see the Community Health Profiles for the numbers)

UES: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-mn8.pdf>

EH: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-mn11.pdf>

A. Subjective: List your personal opinions about growing up in East Harlem - Danny

DANNY: When I was younger, I used to go out to the park more often and go for more walks, and even though I still do those things, there is a vast difference from then to now. Growing up in East Harlem made me see how my neighborhood was changing little by little and how it was getting worse over the years. The massive rent increase made me see more homeless at the park beaches. The crimes increased as the weather did. Seeing the place where you felt the safest, I was no longer safe. If we are unsustainable, East Harlem will only worsen for our future generations to live what we lived growing up.

Wealth inequality, Housing inequality, Marginalization

B. Objective: List the different statistics

Elaborate- more analysis on your statistics (Carmen)

Money: What's the difference in the poverty rate?

Health: What's the difference in life expectancy?

Any other essential differences?

ALEXIS: The Upper East Side population is expected to live nine years longer than East Harlem residents. The East Harlem statistics show that 13% of East Harlem's residents are 65 years or older, in comparison, the Upper East Side statistics reveal that 20% of the Upper East Side residents are 65 or older. That means 7% more elderly! To put this into perspective, there are roughly 28,877 more residents over the age of 65 in the UES, which just alludes to the idea that we don't live to get as old and wise as the Upper East Side.

III. The Data

A. Water Quality

What happens to the East River when it rains? (Feel free to use photos)

When it rains, the water flows down to the sewer system, which makes the East River polluted from the overflowing of the sewage, making the sewer system unable to handle it. As a group, we took a sample from the East River to test the water before and after it rained. The results represent that there were high levels of bacteria when it rained. To decrease the pollution in the river, it would be great if we could increase the use of bioswales to collect the extra rainwater and be distributed by using plants, trees, grass, and gardens. The Environment and the sewer system would receive good help.

B. Air Quality (Danny)

We didn't measure air quality directly, but what data do we have to suggest differences in air quality?

Because trucks have a massive contribution to air quality, we separated into groups, and we got to

C. Temperature

Why does temperature matter? (There are three effects we talked about)

How much difference does shade make?

ADRIANA: East Harlem, compared to the Upper East Side, has fewer trees on sidewalks, dramatically affecting the neighborhood's temperature. A treeless sidewalk is 10 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than one with trees. Having trees reduces the heat people feel during the summer, cleans the air, provides oxygen, and makes it a pleasant place to be. The increase in temperature affects crime, older people dying, and mental health problems.

ESTEFANI: Temperature has severely increased a lot. A significant impact on our environment, plants, our communities, and especially the people who have a higher risk of health problems, especially the older people causing the increased risk of heart strokes and heart attacks. Violence, as the temperatures rise during the summer the violent rates skyrocket making the people grumpy, stressed, and suffer dehydration, with temperatures rising to create climate change, heat levels rising creating water levels to increase, more natural disasters to occur like hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, volcanic explosions (land, and under-water). To make a fundamental difference, we need to plant more trees in our communities in East Harlem, like in the kid's

playgrounds and on the sidewalks. By doing this, we could use them to make more shades to reduce the high rates of heat strokes, heart attacks, dehydration, violence, also help decrease the loud noises from traffic, construction early in the mornings, trucks, other motor vehicles, and being able to breath clean, fresh air.

D. Noise (Carmen)

We didn't record the data with Luz Guel (the lady with the app), but what differences did you notice?

ALEXIS: Noise is also a type of pollution, in a city like ours there is a significant amount of noise. Sounds at high volume can contribute to hearing loss and affect mental health, and even cause high blood pressure, so we decided to test the sounds in different locations around East Harlem. In some places, such as streets, there are high decibel sounds that are harmful. We also measured the sound decibels in a park, and we concluded that there is less sound with more trees. Trees act as barriers that can deflect and refract sound waves decreasing the amount of sound in the area.

III. The Solutions

What can help solve all these problems?

What other things would you like changed in the neighborhood?

ESTEFANI: Councilwoman Diana Ayala, we are a group of students and community members looking for a change in East Harlem. We realized that by making these small changes in our neighborhood, we hope that the air quality, water quality, and climate change in East Harlem can influence change in other countries worldwide.

ALEXIS: Considering various problems that we face every day in East Harlem, we have concluded that trees can be a viable and attainable possible solution. Bioswales can absorb rainwater when our sewers are already overflowing; a group of trees in the same area can act as a bioswale. Trees also act as sound barriers and lower the volume of harmful sounds in a room. Another benefit of trees is that they can cool down temperatures when boiling outside. Trees can lower temperatures up to 10 degrees during the summer heat! With all the data spread out in front of us, it would be safe to infer that planting more trees in our neighborhood is one of the best, if not the best, solutions to many of the problems we face in East Harlem.

Activism! (Young Lords)