

# The Good Fight

*In an era of need, David Garza '86 is "not locking anyone out."*

by NELL PORTER BROWN

**D**URING A whirlwind tour of Henry Street Settlement's operations, executive director David Garza '86 stops at the Workforce Development Center. Classrooms and offices take up a whole floor of an old building at the corner of Essex and Delancey streets, in the heart of New York City's Lower East Side.

Stepping unannounced into an ESL class, Garza is right at home, greeting the 20 students: "How are you? You sound good! What are you working on today?"

Colors, clothing, and possessive adjectives, the teacher says, lifting a student's device. "Is this my phone?"

"No," a medley of voices replies. "It's her phone."

"Where's everyone from?" Garza wants to know. China. Tibet. Nepal. Ecuador. Russia. He adds, "I'm from Brooklyn," and they all laugh. "Who's been here the longest?"

One woman shyly replies, "Eighteen years."

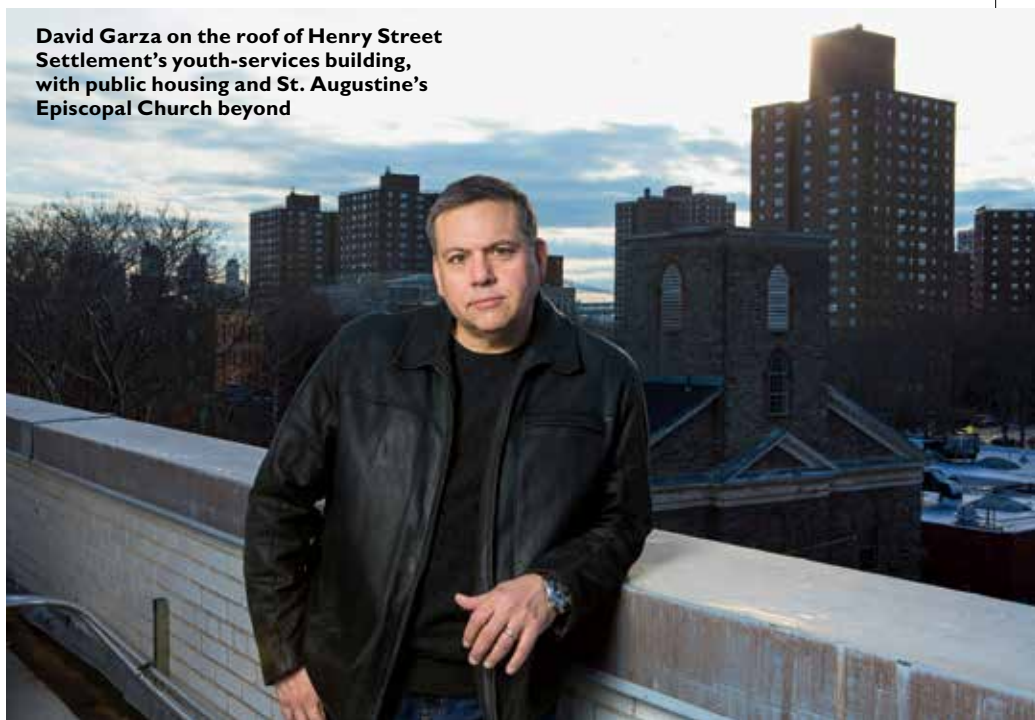
"Oh!" he calls out, game-show style: "We have a winner!" Then, he's suddenly serious: "We're really glad you're here."

Here is where Garza filled in as a temporary teacher of a résumé-writing workshop, in 2001—and never left. The center serves more than 4,600 people a year, placing at least 600 in permanent jobs, and more than 2,200 youths in their first workplaces. "These are folks who would not fare very well navigating the labor market themselves," he adds: from ESL learners to young adults in the internship program and others transitioning out of homeless shelters. Garza also designed the programs—not for discrete populations, like homeless youths or domestic-abuse victims, which funders typically prefer, he says, but "so that anyone walking in off the street can access services. As a settlement house, we are not locking anyone out."

All told, Henry Street Settlement supports

more than 50,000 clients—from preschoolers to the elderly, and about 60 percent from the Lower East Side—through dozens of services covering education, employment, health care, transitional housing, and the arts. That includes operating four homeless shelters and a fully licensed primary-care clinic, a retirement community, and preschool, afterschool, and college-success programs.

**David Garza on the roof of Henry Street Settlement's youth-services building, with public housing and St. Augustine's Episcopal Church beyond**



For decades, the area has been dominated visually and culturally by 22 public-housing towers, most built between the 1920s and the 1960s. They house about 30,000 people, and eight of Henry Street's programs, such as senior services at the Vladek Houses, and, farther north, the Boys and Girls Republic community center at the Baruch Houses. There, children get homework help, snacks, and recreational activities, like Saturday Night Lights basketball games, along with a "safe harbor." "Unfortunately, gun violence has been completely normalized here," he adds. "We go on lockdown way too often."

Practically a municipality itself, Henry Street Settlement has 700 employees, 18 sites, a presence in 30 public schools, and a \$41-million byzantine budget fed by more than 125 public and private sources. Managing the money and bureaucracies, while responding to daily crises inherent in 24/7 social-services work, is, Garza often says, "like playing a 15-dimensional game of chess in three different time zones."

Yet the mission—"to open doors of opportunity, to enrich lives, and enhance human progress"—is simple. And grounded in history. Henry Street was founded in 1893, during the Progressive Era, by a middle-class Jewish nurse named Lillian D. Wald. At 26, she moved into an apartment on the Lower East Side and began ministering to the impoverished, predominantly Eastern European and Jewish immigrants living in

tenements rife with disease, hunger, and violence. Aided by others, including philanthropic New Yorkers, she was soon leading the nation's first visiting-nurse service. Her work evolved into the settlement house, which she ran from a donated 1820s townhouse on Henry Street that doubled as her home. The settlement is still headquartered in that building, and two adjoining townhouses—all protected as designated historic landmarks, as is the exterior of the former firehouse next door, which Henry Street acquired last year and will open this spring as a neighborhood center.

Garza gathers with children from Henry Street's early-childhood education program.



The stalwart block of red-brick structures stands out today, architecturally and symbolically, amid a new reality: rapid gentrification. That “tale of two cities” slogan New York City mayor Bill de Blasio ran on in 2013? Garza notes: “Here, it’s the tale of a block.”

Median household incomes in Garza’s community district (which also includes the East Village and Chinatown) already range from \$17,000 to \$130,000—the second-largest gap in the city. More than a quarter of its 165,000 residents (and 45 percent of its children) live in poverty, which is \$25,750 for a

family/household of four, under federal guidelines. But that “archaic” rate structure, Garza says, is not adjusted for inflation and “grossly understates what it means to be income-insecure or self-sufficient” in Manhattan.

THE HIGH COST of living, and shrinking affordable housing options, are compounded by the thousands of new market-rate housing units available through recently completed, approved, and pending condominium towers, he says. Walking toward the organization’s single-parent family shelter, Garza points to a new, glass-clad Extell Development skyscraper that overlooks the East River, dwarfing the Manhattan Bridge. Units are currently listed at between \$1.24 million and \$6.6 million, with amenities like a fitness center and spa with a saltwater pool, a bowling alley and theater, and cigar and wine rooms. Marketers tout the area—where the median household income directly around the tower is \$30,000, and about 30

percent of the people live below the poverty line—as “glamour and grandeur meet graffiti and grit in this proud home to avant-garde galleries, cutting-edge boutiques, and trailblazing bars.”

Garza notes that the developers also built an adjacent 13-story building of units for people earning 60 percent of the area median income, as part of the approval process. But he considers that a minimal benefit, especially since the City Planning Commission in December approved three more adjacent luxury towers in that Two Bridges section, despite local opposition. Garza, who still lives in the Brooklyn apartment building where he grew up with two siblings and a single mother, testified against it, and keeps an image of the towers on his phone “because I look at it, and I get a little nauseous,” he says. “The commission’s big defense was that it’s legal to do what they’re doing. And my perspective is that just ‘cause it’s legal doesn’t make it right. I mean, it used to be legal to own someone else.”

The settlement is a service agency, but because of the recognized affordable-housing crisis, which affects his constituents and offends his own sense of rootedness, Garza has made advocating for housing a top 2019 priority, and held a community town meeting

## Alumni Association Honors Clubs and Shared Interest Groups

THE HONORS, awarded at the Harvard Alumni Association’s winter meeting in February, celebrate alumni who have made exceptional contributions to their clubs, and Shared Interest Groups (SIGs) that have significantly improved or developed new programs to contribute to the growth and sustainability of their local alumni communities.

As president of the 6,000-member Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance (H4A), Jeannie Park ’83 continues the work that she began as an undergraduate: organizing and inspiring the University’s multiple Asian populations. In 2010, she co-chaired the inaugural Harvard Asian Alumni Summit, which drew more than 400 alumni spanning six decades and all of Harvard’s schools. Since then, Park has also been instrumental in hosting two more H4A summits. More recently, she has shown characteristic leadership and diplomacy in listening to alumni of all backgrounds regarding the current admissions lawsuit, and collaborating with multiple alumni groups to support diversity at Harvard.

In just two years as president of the Harvard Club of Miami, Jeff Bartel ’88, a business leader and philanthropist, has overseen exceptional club growth. He has dedicated time, energy, and financial support to the endeavor, working with members

to triple the size of the membership, increase financial stability, and more effectively gather and communicate with South Florida alumni. During 2018, the club hosted 10 events, including lectures, a Harvard-Yale Game party, and a community-service panel discussion on college and career advice, which took place at a local high school.

Although the 10 board members of the Harvard University Club of Brazil represent six schools and seven programs, they are united in their mission of engaging and strengthening the Brazilian alumni community. Within the last 18 months, the board has reinstated regular meetings, organized the membership process, and hosted events that attracted hundreds of participants. The club also partnered with the Brazil office of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies to conduct a Harvard-Brazil Impact Survey to better serve local alumni.

During the last two decades, Harvardwood has grown from a trio of arts-focused alumni into a thriving SIG of more than 10,000 members in chapters across the country, as well as in England and Canada. The organization has organized myriad events, workshops, and social and networking gatherings for students, alumni, and other Harvard affiliates exploring, or already working in, the arts, media, and entertainment sectors. Harvardwood runs mentorship and summer internship programs, along with its Harvardwood 101 project, which sponsors undergraduates in Los Angeles during Wintersession.



on the subject in January. Real-estate development, public housing, and tenants' rights have traditionally been heavily regulated in New York. Yet, as Garza says, "There is a gross disproportionality between the housing stock that's being created and the need."

The income thresholds are often too high for the poorest residents; furthermore, 70,000 applicants vied for the 204 Extell apartments and more recently, he says, 90,000 people applied for a separate group of 98 similarly affordable apartments in the first week alone. One of the city's most popular tax-subsidy programs is available to developers who create affordable units that are indexed, he says, to a percentage of households' average median income on a scale sliding from 40 percent to 165 percent—which, however, "invariably results in a very, very small number of *truly* affordable units being created." Most such projects result in 80 percent market-rate and 20 percent officially designated affordable units, he continues; far fewer yield an equal proportion of units, or are 100 percent affordable. The most recent mega-development project transforming the Lower East Side—Essex Crossing, kitty-corner to the Workforce Development Center—went 50/50, he says, "primarily because it was high-profile land owned by the city that previously had low-income housing on it, which automatically triggered a ULURP [uniform land use review process] by the community board... and the high level of engagement and activity of Lower East Side organizations and residents."

Hearing regularly from people living in fear of displacement when homelessness is already record-high, he's "vehemently opposed to real-estate development that does not create accessible, just, and truly affordable housing opportunities for the people who *make* communities—like my mother."

WHEN Garza's parents divorced, she received no child support, and moved the family into a rent-stabilized apartment in what was then a predominantly blue-collar neighborhood, Park Slope (now among the priciest locales in Brooklyn). She worked nights as a nurse, returning home at 7 A.M. to help the kids get out to school. She did that for 18 years, and kept working hard until the day she had a heart attack, and died, at age 64, two months before she was slated to retire. "I can't say I knew the full struggle of poverty, although I do know what a ketchup

## Overseer and HAA Director Candidates

THIS SPRING, alumni can vote for new Harvard Overseers and Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) elected directors. Ballots will be sent by April 1; completed ballots must be received by 5 P.M. EDT on May 21 to be counted. All holders of Harvard degrees, except Corporation members and officers of instruction and government, are entitled to vote for Overseer candidates. The election for HAA directors is open to all Harvard degree-holders.

Candidates for Overseer may also be nominated by petition. Eligible voters may go to [elections.harvard.edu](http://elections.harvard.edu) for more information. (The deadline for all petitions was February 1.)

The HAA Nominating Committee has proposed the following candidates in 2019.\*

For Overseer (six-year term):

**Danguole Spakevicius Altman '81**, Houston. Founder, Vapogenix Inc.

**Alice Hm Chen, M.P.H. '01**, Berkeley. Chief medical officer and deputy director, San Francisco Health Network

**Scott C. Collins '87, J.D. '90**, Boston. Managing director and COO, Summit Partners

**Janet Echelman '87**, Brookline, Massachusetts. Visual artist, Studio Echelman

**Vivian Hunt '89, M.B.A. '95, D.B.E.**, London. Managing partner, U.K. and Ireland, McKinsey & Company, Inc.

**Tyler Jacks '83**, Cambridge. Director, Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**John B. King Jr. '96 ('95)**, Washington, D.C. President and CEO, The Education Trust

**Reshma Saujani, M.P.P. '99**, New York City. Founder and CEO, Girls Who Code

**Ryan Wise, Ed.L.D. '13**, Des Moines. Director, Iowa Department of Education

For elected director (three-year term)

**George C. Alex '81**, Cohasset, Massachusetts. CEO, Twin Oaks Capital

**Bryan C. Barnhill II '08**, Detroit. City manager, City Solutions, Ford Smart Mobility

**Ethel Billie Branch '01, J.D.-M.P.P. '08**, Window Rock, Arizona. Attorney general, The Navajo Nation

**Salomé Cissal de Ugarte, LL.M. '94**, Brussels. Managing partner, Hogan Lovells

**Adrienne E. Dominguez '90**, Dallas. Partner, intellectual property, Thompson & Knight LLP

**Michael J. Gaw '90**, Alexandria, Virginia. Assistant director, division of trading and markets, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

**Christina Lewis '02**, New York City. Founder and CEO, All Star Code

**Zandile H. Moyo '00**, Indian Springs, Alabama. Consultant, strategy and financial advisory services

**Derek C.M. van Bever, M.B.A. '88, M.Div. '11**, Cambridge. Senior lecturer and director of the Forum for Growth & Innovation, Harvard Business School

\*The HAA Nominating Committee has nominated nine candidates for Overseer, rather than the usual eight. This reflects an additional vacancy on the board created by the departure of James Hildreth '79, who has stepped down in light of other professional obligations.

sandwich tastes like," Garza says. "But my mother? She knew the struggle."

At the local Catholic school, he did well academically and played football and baseball, but at night, after his mother left for the hospital, he went out and, over the years, took his share of adolescent risks. "And I had friends, who I can count in the double digits, who died with the onset of heroin and crack, you name it," he says. "That stuff takes no prisoners."

His own life "grew a lot more precarious" when his hip shattered in the summer after

ninth grade, the result of an injury and a congenital predisposition. Garza spent the next four years in and out of body casts and braces, or on crutches. He's had seven reconstructive surgeries, most recently in 2014, and still walks with a limp. "I had wanted to go to Syracuse and play football. But with this," he pats his hip, "I was lucky to even walk again."

He nevertheless kept up his grades, and his guidance counselor recommended applying to some Ivy League schools. Garza got into them all, and let his mother decide on Harvard. Medical-school dreams,

born of admiring his mother and those who'd cared for him, evaporated after organic chemistry "kicked my ass freshman year," he says; instead, he concentrated in psychology and social relations.

"I'll tell you the truth," he adds, sitting in his office: "I was completely directionless at Harvard." He stuck close to his roommates, and spent more time working—as a departmental assistant and a bartender at the Hasty Pudding, among other jobs—than in classes. "I came to Harvard with the misconception that if I asked for help, that reinforced that I didn't belong. And then any normal level of anxiety was intensified because I didn't ask for help. Where I came

from, it's just not something you do," he adds. "I was a fish out of water. I was afraid to ask, 'How do you swim through this?'"

Graduating with tens of thousands of dollars of student debt, he returned to his mother's apartment and took a retail job in the executive-training program at Macy's. Smart, entertaining, and assertive, he moved quickly into senior management, and then on to the Gap, where he met his future wife, Gina, now an executive at L'Oréal. By 1991, they were living in what had been his apartment since 1989, a floor below his mother's, where they still are. When their daughter was born, he stayed home to care for her, and then transferred his professional skills into film and television

production, freelancing for news networks and product companies before specializing in sports with clients like the National Hockey League and the New York Giants.

The jobs suited his hard-charging, agile personality—"I'm as comfortable in the boardroom as I am on the street corner"—but he was still not fulfilled. He had realized that since graduation, he'd operated "under the fundamentally inaccurate perspective that I had to translate my Ivy League education into a high level of economic success to help my mom."

In 2001, he decided to "stop chasing dollars and follow my heart," and began exploring a possible move into social work. His former Harvard roommate, and still his closest friend, Joe Raposo (now director of donor relations at the Kennedy School) suggested he join a volunteer group working on repairs to the Church of St. Teresa—a five-minute walk from Henry Street Settlement. That led to a meeting with its then-director, Daniel Kronenfeld, and, Garza recalls, a visceral insight: "The way the sun was shining, the connection with the people, and the purpose...I just knew that everything felt right about Henry Street." A few months later, when a teacher left, he was asked to step in to lead that résumé-writing workshop.

HIS FIRST STUDENTS were welfare recipients transitioning to the workforce. "Eighty percent wanted to work; the other 20 percent were a distraction," he recalls. "So I, kind of Brooklyn-style, said to them, 'Well, you can leave. You know, the door's not locked.... Then I found out they *had* to be there. There's this whole alphabet-soup of acronyms—they were FTC, 'failed to comply' or an FIA case, 'family independence administration,' or HRAESP, NYC Human Resources Administration/Employment Services and Placement: everything here was an acronym—I was just trying to produce quality résumés. But the 80 percent, and the families and individuals I connected to, because I am still in touch with some of them, were just a life-changing experience."

Within a year, he'd been hired full-time, and was then named director of employment services; in 2004, he became the center's chief administrator. During those years, Garza saw that vacant lots and derelict buildings in the Delancey Street area would ultimately be filled and renewed, and "that we should not only aim to serve the job seeker, but also...the employer." He was

## Harvard University's 368th Commencement Exercises

Thursday, May 30, 2019

[commencement.harvard.edu](https://commencement.harvard.edu)

**SINCE 1642**, with just nine graduating students, Harvard's Commencement Exercises have brought together the community unlike any other tradition still observed in the University. Degree candidates with family and friends, faculty and administrators who supported them, and alumni from around the world are anticipated to participate in our 368th Commencement Exercises this spring. To accommodate the increasing number of people planning to attend, we ask that any interested readers carefully review the guidelines governing ticketing, regalia, security precautions, and other important details, which are available online at <https://commencement.harvard.edu/ticket-information>.

### Commencement Day Overview

**THE MORNING EXERCISES** begin when the academic procession is seated in Tercenary Theatre. Three student orators deliver addresses, and the dean of each School introduces the candidates for their respective degrees, which the president then confers. Toward the conclusion of the ceremony the graduating seniors are asked to rise, and their degrees are conferred on them as a group by the president. Honorary Degrees are then conferred before the Exercises are adjourned.

**DIPLOMA-GRANTING CEREMONIES AND LUNCHEONS:** Graduates and their guests return to their respective undergraduate Houses or graduate and professional Schools. Harvard and Radcliffe College alumni/ae who have celebrated their 50th Reunion are invited to join the Tree Spread luncheon, Harvard and Radcliffe Reunions gather for class-based luncheons, while all other alumni may pre-purchase tickets for boxed lunches at the Alumni Spread in Harvard Yard.

**THE AFTERNOON PROGRAM** features an address by Harvard President Lawrence S. Bacow and the Commencement speaker, Chancellor Angela Merkel. Officially called the Annual Meeting of the Harvard Alumni Association, this program includes the Overseer and HAA director election results, presentations of the Harvard Medals, and remarks by the HAA president.

— *The Harvard Commencement Office and The Harvard Alumni Association*

already versed in the requisite private-sector language and culture, and easily became “something of a quasi-expert on labor-market needs.” He forged early, productive relationships with new hotels and restaurants, as well as new funding and support partnerships with other agencies and corporations.

In 2010, Garza was appointed executive director. Early on, he restructured the development department, increasing both private and public funding to record highs, and expanding services. He led the response to Hurricane Sandy’s destruction in 2012, providing mental-health counseling, resources, and support for families. He also conceived of and established Promoting the Arts through Henry Street (PATHS), which weaves the arts into all aspects of the organization’s services, such as an oral-history video project with local seniors. And he’s “put the street back into Henry Street,” eschewing bureaucratic distractions to focus on better connecting the organization and its community through new town hall events, participatory budgeting, and the creation of a community advisory board and youth leadership council.

In 2013, he launched a \$20-million capital campaign that culminated with the agency’s quasiquicentennial celebration last fall, and the opening of a permanent, public exhibit at Henry Street Settlement recounting its own and the Lower East Side’s rich history (a natural complement to tours at the nearby Tenement Museum, led by Kevin Jennings ’85). Other campaign projects include the firehouse renovation and revitalization of the organization’s 43-year-old Abrons Arts Center on Grand Street—a venue for classes, performances, and events, and home to the attached, century-old, Playhouse Theater.

“Of course, that corner is all prime real estate,” Garza says. “We have had so many developers ring our bell,” wanting, for example, to pay millions for the arts center and its air rights, and then build Henry Street another one (which it would occupy, perhaps through a long-term, no-payments lease)—at the base of a new, luxury housing tower. Such a lucrative sale would tempt any nonprofit. It had already been considered by Henry Street trustees, and was under debate when Garza took the helm. Instead, he and others endorsed the unprecedented capital campaign, raising more money than the sale probably would have. “That’s why I’ve got to fight the good fight on the ground,” he says. “I was just not going to let gentrification come into our house like that.”

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