

A Balancing Act

Addressing the Impact of a Changing Harlem at St. Nicholas Houses



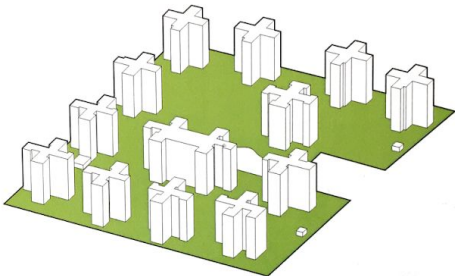
Saint Nicholas Houses

A. Background

The Saint Nicholas Houses is located in Central Harlem between 127th and 131st Streets, Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, and Frederick Douglass Avenue -- only a few blocks from the historic Apollo Theater within a vibrant and rapidly changing neighborhood. Built under Title I of the 1949 Federal Housing Act (also known as the “Slum Clearance and Community Development and Redevelopment Act”), the development is composed of 13 buildings, each 14 storeys tall, and contains a total of 1,526 apartments. There are a total of 3,525 residents living within Saint Nicholas Houses, comprised predominantly of Black/African American and

Hispanic/Latino residents. Saint Nicholas is a considerably youthful population, with 28 percent of residents under the age of 18 and 13 percent of residents between the ages of 18 and 24. At Saint Nicholas Houses, the median individual income is \$12,012 and the median household income is \$18,151 and the median monthly rent for an apartment is \$397. 54 percent of residents have an annual household income below \$20,000. 34 percent of all households with a child under the age of 18 are headed by a single parent or a kinship caregiver.

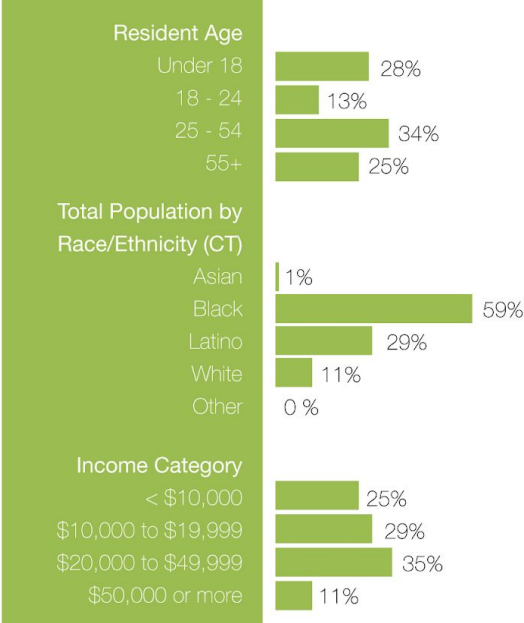
Saint Nicholas Houses



Year Built: 1954
 # of Buildings: 13
 # of Floors: 14
 Total Units: 1,526
 Population: 3,435

County: New York
 Community District: 10
 Census Tract: 224
 Neighborhood: Central Harlem

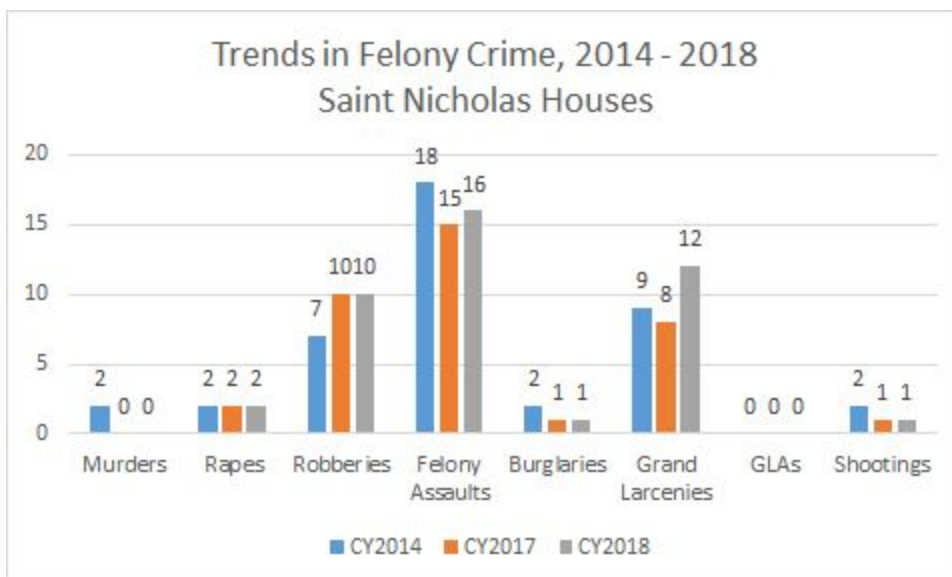
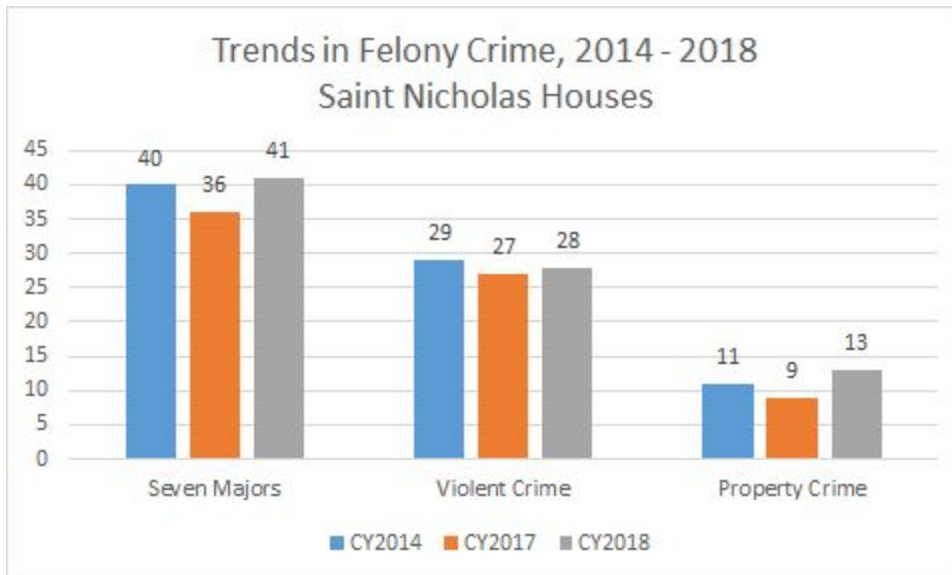
Illustration: NYCHAPEDIA



B. Crime Overview | Trust | Justice

Rates of index, violent and felony crime remain close to Calendar Year (CY) 2014 levels, the year that MAP began. Rates of crime in CY 2018 increased slightly from CY 2017. In CY 2018, index crime was up (+5), as was violent crime (+1) and property crime (+4) from CY 2017.¹ These changes in CY 2018 were driven by increases in felony assault (+1) and grand larceny (+4).

¹ Index crime, also known as “major crime” consists of the following crime categories: burglary, felony assault, grand larceny auto, grand larceny, murder, rape, and robbery.



C. Priority Identification | Opportunity | Employment

Nearly 20 percent of the Saint Nicholas Houses population is between the ages of 14 to 24 and many young people living in the Saint Nicholas Houses find the path from education to employment and economic security in adulthood inaccessible. And, while there has been some success in addressing opportunities for young people in Central Harlem more broadly, Saint Nicholas residents report that new employment opportunities are not reaching their youth. Saint Nicholas residents also state that they are seeking pathways to careers in a variety of sectors, including technology, the arts, education, skill trades, and more.

Researchers also noted that the Harlem neighborhood surrounding Saint Nicholas Houses is heavily affected by gentrification, marked by higher rents and home prices, as well as changes to the racial and ethnic demography of the neighborhood. In Harlem, the average studio apartment now rents for approximately \$1,800.²

A study conducted by ABT Associates, in collaboration with the Center for Economic Opportunity (now NYC Opportunity) and NYCHA, assessed the impact of gentrifying neighborhoods on NYCHA campuses like Saint Nicholas Houses. Researchers found that

“[T]here is an undercurrent of fear of being displaced [among NYCHA residents]. Even if rents remain affordable, the rising costs of everything around them feels like pressure to leave the neighborhood...Despite these efforts, there are no mechanisms to help mom-and-pop establishments... and few jobs at the new retail establishments seem to materialize for NYCHA residents.”³

Many Saint Nicholas residents expressed similar concerns about neighborhood changes:

“I’ve seen how the neighborhood has changed. It’s going to push out people who can no longer afford to live here now.”

“Affordable housing is an issue everywhere but I think Harlem was a place that was affordable in my time and now it feels like it ain’t anymore.”

“The community board should continue to advocate for the people of Harlem for a new business like Whole Foods to hire locally.”

How we can work together to increase employment opportunities:

1. Youth and Young Adult Employment

Challenge: In the Saint Nicholas census tract, 44 percent of residents live below the poverty line, more than double the rate in New York City. Over 60 percent of residents under the age of 18 live in poverty. The 2015 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Community Health Profile indicated that nearly half of all residents in Central Harlem spend more than 30 percent of their monthly gross income on rent.⁴ According to NYCHA, 55 percent of Saint Nicholas Houses working-age residents *do not* report income from employment. Of the 45 percent of residents that *do* report income, many may be engaged in low-wage work.

In Saint Nicholas, approximately one out of every seven teens between 16 and 19 is not in school and not employed -- a rate that is double the citywide average -- and more than one in five

² http://www.mns.com/manhattan_rental_market_report

³ https://nextcity.org/pdf/nycha_ceo_report.pdf

⁴ This number may underestimate the number of Saint Nicholas residents who are similarly rent burdened because it reflects the number of individuals who are rent burdened at the community district level, not the development-level.

residents between the ages of 20 and 24 are not in school and not employed.⁵ While community-based organizations like the Harlem Children’s Zone have made great efforts to reverse the adverse effects of youth disengagement and unemployment, residents of Saint Nicholas Houses are seeking programs and opportunities for existing out of school, out of work (OSOW) youth and adults.

It is critical to invest in the resources that support job experience and educational attainment for young people living within NYCHA communities. Pressures associated with financial insecurity have a particularly insidious impact on youth who may struggle to find well-paying jobs. Helping young people prepare to engage in work and life as productive adults is a central challenge for any society. This is especially true in Saint Nicholas Houses, where youth and community members cite the lack of access to educational, employment and economic opportunities as roadblocks to success. The lack of access to opportunities for low-income and less-educated families often leads to lower rates of high school graduation, college enrollment, and college completion. Eventually, low educational attainment leads to decreased employment and economic opportunities.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Expand work-based learning opportunities within schools or community-based programs.** Work-based learning experiences such as internships, apprenticeships, and mentoring enables adults to provide students with developmentally appropriate and incremental guidance that helps them develop the skills that employers seek in new hires.
- **Increase engagement in the Summer Youth Employment Program.** Residents of Saint Nicholas Houses who follow necessary protocols will be guaranteed enrollment in the SYEP program. If SYEP effectively connects to local employers that surround the development, young people can take advantage of this entry point into employment and gain the many benefits described above.
- **Increase completion rates of post-secondary degrees, with an explicit focus on quality and equity.** Consider working with the Department of Education to provide special assistance to support Saint Nicholas residents, including more student supports and services such as tutoring and proactive advising. Furthermore, providing access to supports that ensure that Saint Nicholas residents and students gain access to assistance in case of financial or other emergencies.
- **Improve on-ramps to employment for teens and young adults, particularly for those without post-secondary credentials.** These on-ramps to employment can take many forms, including work-based learning programs, work readiness and technical skills

⁵ https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/NYC_Neighborhood_Economic_Profiles_2017.pdf

development (often in combination with academics), mentoring, supportive services, and paid internships or stipends. Well-designed programs align training with local employer needs and look for employment opportunities for potential for advancement.

- **Implement a youth-focused capacity building program.** As an immediate next step, the NeighborhoodStat CPTED Subcommittee will build a digital platform that will promote community-based programs and services and activate underutilized spaces on the St. Nicholas Campus. This youth engagement program will be held at the existing Resident Association computer room and include training in coding, leadership, GED, and social service education. In addition, young people will be positioned as leaders in organizing pop-up outdoor programming in underused plazas and other open spaces on the St. Nicholas Campus in order to showcase the learning gained and the shared interactive tools created through this capacity building program. This program could benefit from technical assistance and resource support from agencies such as Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer (MOCTO) and the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development (WKDEV) to ensure success and sustainability of this program. Support from the Department for the Aging’s (DFTA) Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) program could support seniors who need tech education to utilize the tool.

2. Access to Local Employment Opportunities

Challenge: Most local employment opportunities are not well publicized by the employer and word of available opportunities is not widely communicated to residents by the employer or by other residents. In addition, not all employers feel motivated to recruit or hire local residents. To compound things further, many residents report that they are not aware of existing jobs in the area, nor are they aware of opportunities for career development or job placement assistance. Besides organization like Workforce 1, there are few organizations with the explicit purpose of supporting workforce development. Those that are committed to employing local residents are not engaged in the community effectively enough to ensure that Saint Nicholas is aware of and able to access open positions.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Connect residents to workforce development programs.** The NeighborhoodStat stakeholder team, in partnership with community based organizations and stakeholders, should explore the availability of existing workforce development programs, and, where applicable, identify any limitations or obstacles that exist for enrollment and participation. The NeighborhoodStat team should consider working with or consulting resources provided by city agencies such as NYCHA’s Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability (REES), Small Business Services (SBS), the Mayor’s

Office of Workforce Development (WKDEV), the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME), and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Also, consider raising awareness of existing opportunities by conducting hiring fairs with participation from City agencies and community based organizations that can do direct hiring. Whenever possible, provide working adults with access to trainings that lead to certification (i.e., LEED, Energy Auditor) by providing those trainings on campus grounds.

- **Expand partnerships with local businesses and create pipelines to employment.** There are several large businesses and institutions operating near the Saint Nicholas Houses. If possible, connect with these large businesses and institutions to identify opportunities for Saint Nicholas residents and to solicit recruitment support from these businesses. It is also important to consider whether opportunities exist for New York City employment by connecting with the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS).

D. Priority Identification | Opportunity | Youth Development

Through site audits, the NeighborhoodStat team identified buildings 200, 230, 250 and 260 alongside 131st Street as buildings where illegal activities were most common. The NeighborhoodStat team stated that these buildings were notable for open air drug use (particularly marijuana) and that young people were responsible for much of the negative behavior that was observed.

Engaging Saint Nicholas youth has long been a priority for the NeighborhoodStat team. In developing strategies to support neighborhood youth, the NeighborhoodStat team identified the following obstacles to positive youth engagement:

- Deficiency in basic literacy skills
- Past, present, or chronic homelessness for both the individual as well as the family
- Single parent caregiving, financial insecurity and residential instability.
- Current or previous involvement in the foster care system or criminal justice system
- Active or relational Gang involvement
- Behavioral health issues (including substance abuse and mental health disorders)

Despite concerted efforts to provide young people from Saint Nicholas Houses with meaningful and developmental opportunities, many youth are not attracted to or retained within the available services.



How we can work together to improve youth engagement:

We believe that focusing on providing meaningful programming by covering all aspects of youth development (not just employment or relationship skills) will make a substantive impact on the Saint Nicholas youth.

1. Out-of-school, Out-of-work Youth

Challenge: Available youth programming is typically not holistic enough to address the many needs that might be impacting young people from Saint Nicholas Houses. While research shows that meaningful programming exists that can positively affect a young person's behavior and attitude, in some cases these effective programs are at capacity (e.g., Next STEPS) or are short-term engagements (e.g., SYEP). Once youth are engaged in a program, there is not always a clear strategy about how to support them after program completion. In some instances, if the program provider is not equipped to address specific challenges faced by Saint Nicholas youth, like individual trauma, it may jeopardize successful program completion altogether. These characteristics -- programs being at capacity, programs that cannot engage youth for long, and

programs that don't employ culturally competent staff -- can discourage youth from becoming involved in services at all.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Target investments to Out of School, Out of Work (OSOW) young adult population.** To better target investments, develop a deeper understanding of the characteristics (i.e., goals, motivations, challenges) of this population and the subpopulations within it. This includes youth with disabilities and mental health challenges, young adult veterans, and foster, immigrant and justice-involved youth. Any effective programming should aim to include wrap around services that address and heal trauma, provide opportunities for personal growth and support job readiness programming.
- **Invest in and strengthen opportunities for young adults to access good-paying, quality jobs.** Many Saint Nicholas residents are involved in low-paying part-time work, with limited opportunity for advancement. More services are needed to better prepare young adults to navigate a labor market and achieve long-term career growth within an economy where initial job opportunities are increasingly part-time and low-paying. Support long-term, well-paying employment by providing career advancement possibilities beginning in high school. In addition, build more intentional upskilling opportunities so that part-time, low-wage workers can connect to career pathways.
- **Prioritize career readiness and increase investment in resources that support college completion.** Too many young adults are graduating from high school inadequately prepared for college and their careers. Of those who do complete college, some are leaving without an industry-recognized credential that would support employment in today's labor market.
- **Support neighborhood partnership development.** New York City should support and the development of neighborhood-based strategies that bring together multi-sector partners in a bottom-up network that responds to local labor market and workforce capacity needs to create multiple pipelines to connect young adults to bridge programs, wraparound support services, training and occupational certification programs, postsecondary education, and careers.

E. Priority Identification | Design | Maintenance

Residents of Saint Nicholas Houses report various maintenance concerns throughout the campus. Residents stated that the Saint Nicholas Playground is poorly maintained, which may partially

explain the prevalence of open air drug use that occurs there. Without adequate upkeep, common spaces become neglected and can become places where problematic behavior occurs.

The lack of adequate upkeep extends to the common areas inside the building themselves. The residents of 237 W. 127th Street report mold on their walls and water leaks. Residents state that NYCHA often fails to communicate repair scheduling changes and closes out tickets without completing associated repairs. Residents also complain that NYCHA maintenance staff and caretakers lack supervision, which impacts the quality and rapidity of repair. In addition, residents complained that they were notified by a third-party group, not NYCHA, after a recent outbreak of Legionnaires Disease. Insufficient communication about this critical issue was very distressing to many Saint Nicholas residents.

How we can work together to improve maintenance:

1. Physical Conditions and Maintenance

Challenge: As is true across all of NYCHA, the cost of apartment repairs at Saint Nicholas Houses is substantial. According to NYCHA's *2017 Physical Needs Assessment*, there was an immediate need for \$70.3M to repair issues within apartments (i.e., repair, renovation, or replacement of bathrooms, kitchens, bathtubs, tiling, and kitchen appliances) as well as an additional \$91.5M needed to remedy architectural issues associated with apartments (i.e., windows, doors, walls). The total immediate cost at Saint Nicholas Houses (including all building- and site-specific issues) was estimated to be \$175.9M.

According to the NYCHA website, the number of open work orders at Saint Nicholas Houses has doubled since January 2018. As of January 2019, the most recent month of data available, Saint Nicholas Houses had 3,410 open work orders; one year before, in January 2018, the number of open work orders was 1,820. The average time to completion of work orders is also increasing dramatically. In January 2019, the average time to completion was 75 days, representing a 53 percent increase in time to completion from January 2018. NYCHA's target for work order completion is 15 days.

Saint Nicholas is a spatially large campus, which makes it difficult for groundskeepers to keep the entire campus consistently clean. Residents also believe that aside from potential staffing shortfalls, the residents of the campus should work alongside groundskeepers to improve community hygiene. Residents respect the work the groundskeepers are doing, however the residents are unaware of current staffing patterns and locations where the groundskeepers are concentrating their efforts and would like more transparency around these issues. Penalizing residents for improper disposal is not an effective tool for deterrence and creates an air of mistrust between administration and residents.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Conduct a “Saturday Blitz”.** Through their “Saturday Blitz” initiative, NYCHA quickly performs repairs and engages and assists residents at the developments. Determine if Saint Nicholas Houses has been scheduled to receive Saturday Blitz support. If Saint Nicholas is not scheduled to receive these supportive services, NYCHA should communicate with resident representatives about any upcoming strategies and plans to reduce the number of work orders at Saint Nicholas.
- **Use innovative technology wherever possible to help address issues in the development.** Efforts should be made to incorporate technology based solutions to maximize the effectiveness of maintenance.⁶ Technological innovation has expanded the ability of Property Management to address critical challenges in systems maintenance. Effective technology can allow property managers to use historical performance data to understand the pattern of systems failure allowing them to predict when maintenance is necessary for building systems.
- **Participate in quarterly meetings to discuss maintenance issues.** Quarterly meetings between NYCHA maintenance workers, groundskeepers and property management would be beneficial. Such meetings would be opportunities to facilitate a dialogue to discuss the rate of responses to ticketing issues, upcoming repair schedules, and any other updates that should be relayed to the residents.
- **Establish a formal partnership between groundskeepers and residents** to support clean up days and community events. This partnership might include a resident/groundskeeper rapid response team that can identify troublesome areas and work together to clean them.
- **Establish building floor captains.** This voluntary, incentivized position would help coordinate resident clean up efforts and encourage better coordination amongst residents in clean-up efforts.
- **Provide visible signage in diverse languages to outline waste management procedures.** These signs should be prevalent and visible, written in diverse languages, and will provide instructions on various protocols and processes, including days for bulk pick up and locations for garbage disposal.

⁶ <https://www.constructiondive.com/news/5-technologies-that-are-making-smart-buildings-smarter/429582/>