



**Bibliothèques  
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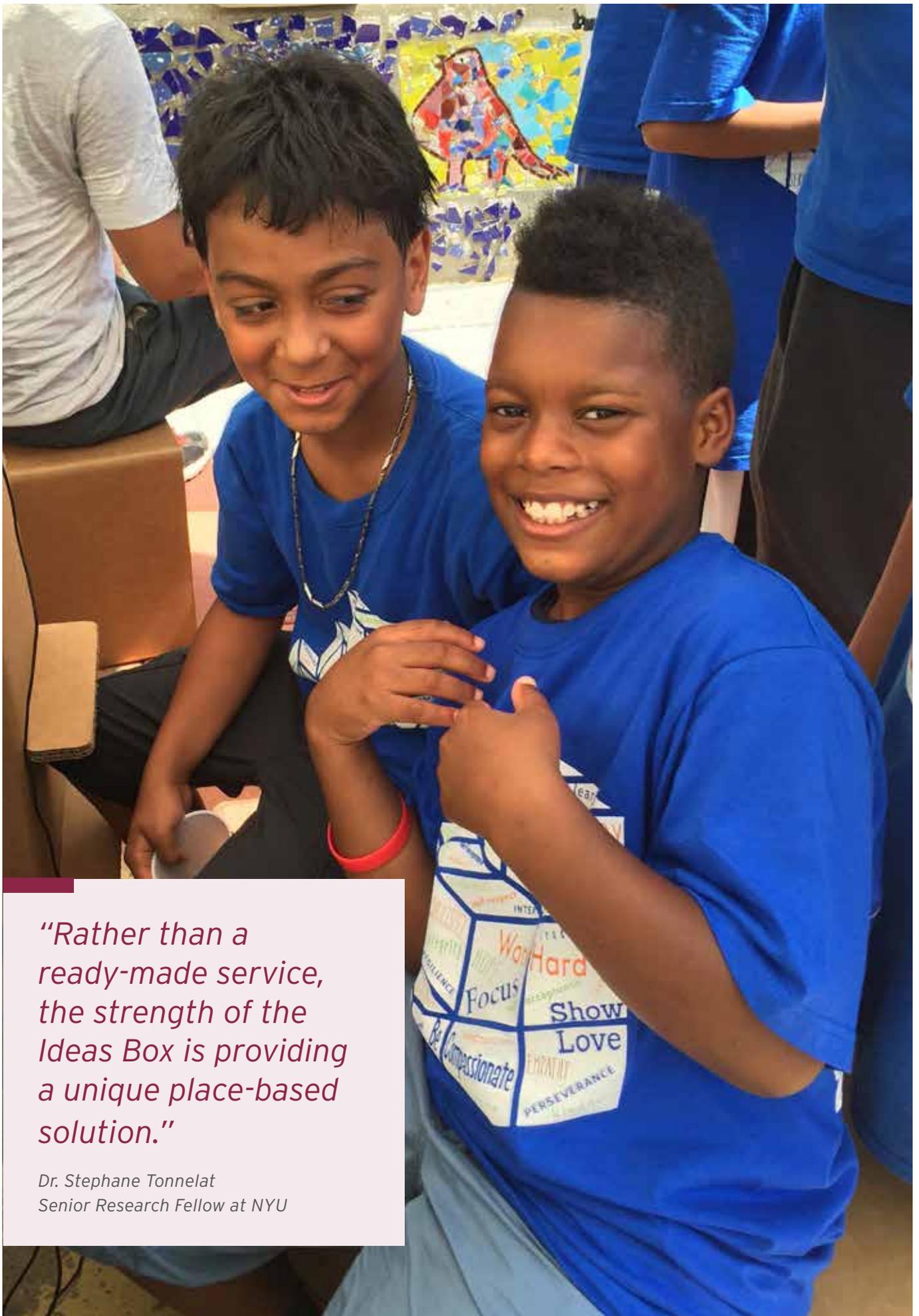


# IDEASBOX

**NEW YORK IMPACT**

USA

**REPORT 2015**



*“Rather than a ready-made service, the strength of the Ideas Box is providing a unique place-based solution.”*

*Dr. Stephane Tonnelat  
Senior Research Fellow at NYU*

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# INTRODUCTION

Through the summer of 2015, Libraries Without Borders (LWB) created pop-up libraries and media centers in Morris Heights, a community in the South Bronx of New York. These Ideas Box programs created safe and accessible spaces for children and their parents, complete with books, computers, tablets, arts and craft supplies, and expert facilitation. In Morris Heights, part of the nation's poorest congressional district, the Ideas Box filled a particularly urgent demand for educational tools and professional development opportunities that empower individuals to design their own solutions for development. From July 15th to September 5th, the Ideas Box was open five afternoons per week, Tuesday through Saturday, from 1:30PM to 5:30PM.



# ABOUT LIBRARIES WITHOUT BORDERS



Chaque Ideas Box est gérée par un Responsable de box burundais et une équipe de trois ou quatre animateurs qui vivent dans le camp.

Photo: DR BSF 2014

LWB is an international non-profit whose mission is to address the structural causes of economic and human underdevelopment, reduce the digital divide, and promote cultural resilience through the advancement of informational access, the promotion of innovative educational programs, and the creation of and support for libraries and librarians. LWB has implemented programs in over 20 countries. The Ideas Box is one of LWB's most recent innovations.

# ABOUT THE IDEAS BOX



The Ideas Box is a portable media center and mobile classroom that fits on two standard transportation pallets and can be installed in 20 minutes. The box expands to create a pop-up space covering over 330 square feet and includes internet connection, laptops and tablets, a library with both paper books and e-readers, and a built-in cinema. The Ideas Box has its own power source and protects its contents from rain. Libraries Without Borders (LWB) builds cross-sector partnerships to curate all contents, to facilitate workshops, and to provide continuous updates and improvements. The Ideas Box was designed by LWB in partnership with Philippe Starck and UNHCR. Today, the Ideas Box is used in a variety of contexts in Australia, Burundi, France, Jordan, and the United States. In all contexts, the mission of the Ideas Box programs is to expand access to information, education, connectivity, and collaborative spaces in ways that empower communities to design their own solutions for development.

# KEY PARTNERS IN THE BRONX

LWB engaged private and public partners to customize the Ideas Box program for Morris Heights, including DreamYard, The New York Public Library (NYPL), Bronx Pro, and the Alexander Soros Foundation. With our community partners, we identified the key goals and priorities for prospective users through focus groups and pre-interviews before co-designing the space and co-selecting the contents.

## ALEXANDER SOROS FOUNDATION

The Alexander Soros Foundation is an organization promoting civil rights, social justice and education by making grants to cuttingedge organizations in the United States and abroad.

The Alexander Soros Foundation provided the grants to launch the international Ideas Box program and to implement the Ideas Box 2015 summer program in the Bronx.

## THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Founded in 1895, NYPL is the nation's largest public library system and serves more than 17 million patrons a year. NYPL supplied books and other educational tools for the Ideas Box 2015 summer program in the Bronx. NYPL librarians from the local Sedgwick Branch facilitated programs at the Ideas Box, including book readings, literacy workshops, and arts and crafts events.

## DREAM YARD

DreamYard is a non-profit that collaborates with Bronx youth, families and schools to build pathways to equity and opportunity through the arts.

DreamYard brought decades of educational experience in the South Bronx to the design and implementation of the Ideas Box 2015 summer program in the Bronx. DreamYard staff and interns facilitated programs at the Ideas Box, including workshops on slam poetry and civil rights.



## BRONX PRO

Bronx Pro Real Estate Management, Inc. is a property management firm formed in 1988. Bronx Pro opened spaces for Ideas Box programming and storage, and managed security during Ideas Box programming. Bronx Pro staff and tenants supported the Ideas Box team in conducting pre and post interviews..

# MORRIS HEIGHTS

Through the invitation of The New York Public Library and Bronx-based non-profit DreamYard, LWB began to design an Ideas Box program in the Morris Heights neighborhood of the South Bronx in New York in the spring of 2015.



In 2010, the Morris Heights neighborhood was part of the congressional district declared to be the poorest in the United States. The American Community Survey compiled for the years 2008-2013 reveals that 40.5 % of the population lives with an income below the poverty line, as compared to 29.8% for the Bronx and 20% for New York City. Another 27.3% of the population is qualified as “struggling,” with income between one to two times the poverty level. The median income, \$25,000 in 2013, is less than half the median income for the whole city. Unemployment is at 25.4%.

Consequences of poverty include an elevated high-school drop out rate (8.1% in Morris Heights), a high proportion of single mother headed households (36.3%), and only a third of the adult population with some college education or more. Recent studies (Sampson 2012; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Sharkey 2013) have shown that social mobility in this type of poor minority urban neighborhoods is very low, if not negative. Many children find themselves economically worse off than their parents.

## CREATING A PROGRAM THAT ADDRESSES THE STRUCTURAL NEEDS OF MORRIS HEIGHTS



Reasons for this cycle of poverty include the poor achievement of children at school, the stagnation of wages, and mounting economic and social inequalities. A landmark study on the achievement gap in poor urban districts of Baltimore showed that, in a given neighborhood, the children from the poorest families are the most at risk of failing before they reach 9th grade (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2007). According to the authors, the main handicap faced by these children is a lack of educational opportunities during the long summer break.

## CREATING A PROGRAM THAT ADDRESSES THE STRUCTURAL NEEDS OF MORRIS HEIGHTS



The children raised in families that value education (usually because they completed at least some college) have a small chance of moving up the social ladder, children of poorer social-economic and educational status living in the same neighborhood suffer from a learning achievement gap accumulated summer after summer. This observation combined with economic data from the neighborhood suggests that a large proportion of today's children growing up in Morris Heights will have few opportunities for economic and professional mobility in life, in part because they do not benefit from access to creative and educational activities over the summer. An additional handicap is the high level of violence, both domestic and on the streets. Fear pushes many parents to keep their children indoors (Katz 2004).

# OUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Recognizing how more than half of the achievement gap between lower- and high-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities (Alexander et al, 2007), DreamYard and The New York Public Library invited LWB to “close the achievement gap over the summer.”

To pinpoint more specific demands in the Morris Heights community, the LWB team worked with local partners to conduct a needs assessment of prospective users through focus groups and interviews.

The majority of Morris Heights’ residents are Hispanic and about a third of the population is African-American. Many recent-immigrants come from the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean, and Western Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, and

Guinea). Following their requests, the LWB team customized the Ideas Box with Spanish- and French-language content and programming.

The LWB team also engaged the support of local librarians and educators to select the titles of books to include in the Ideas Box library, the apps to be pre-downloaded on the tablets and computers, and the subjects of workshops to facilitate.

# IMPACT ASSESMENT

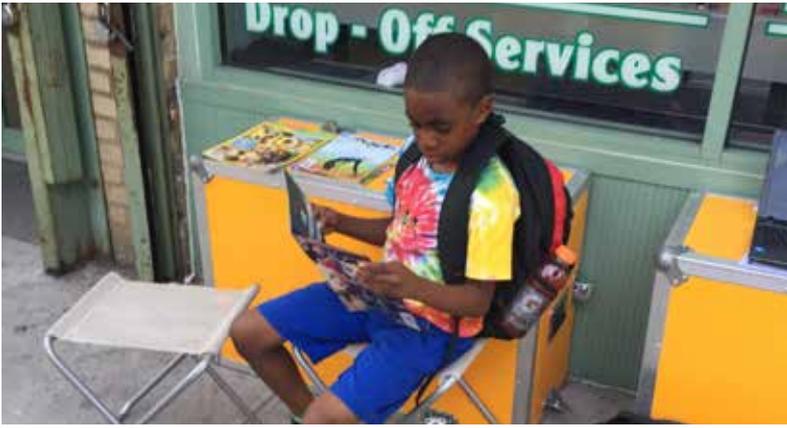


For evaluation and monitoring, the LWB team was supported by Dr. Stephane Tonnelat, a senior researcher at the Center for International Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences at New York University. Through dozens of hours of conducted interviews before and during the Ideas Box summer program and regular surveys of participants, the LWB created dynamic feedback loops to continuously improve the project each day. After the program ended, Dr. Tonnelat continued to follow-up with participants and their families in order to capture a holistic understanding of the pro-gram's impact, and to support LWB's efforts in designing future Ideas Box programs.

# EVALUATION AND MONITORING



Though LWB’s local partners originally asked LWB to bring the Ideas Box to Morris Heights in order to close the education achievement gap for youth over the summer, the Ideas Box team quickly found that, in order to engage students, it was also important to create spaces that welcomed parents. According to Angela, an unemployed single mother of two parents, “the Ideas Box allows me a bit of me-time. You see, kids are demanding. As siblings, they tend to be contentious. Before, we were at the McDon-ald’s play area and they argued the whole time. But they do really good here, ‘cause they have things to pique their interest.” Angela succinctly summarizes a common need in this neighborhood that the Ideas Box helps to fill: free summer educational activities that children find interesting in a welcoming space for both the children and the parents.



Les Ideas Box avant l'ouverture: au camp de Bwagiriza, la Box est installée sous une paillette construite par les réfugiés - Formation des animateurs de l'Ideas Box, Ruyigi. DR BSF 2014.

**According to Dr. Tonnelat's assessment, the Ideas Box filled three key needs in the Morris Heights community:**

**1.**

The Ideas Box created a safe and accessible space for children to learn. Frank, an older participant at thirteen years old, played an important role when discussing which topic to choose for a participatory documentary workshop. His thoughtful questions and active participation in the group supported younger participants with a role model, which also raised Frank's own self-confidence. On the last day, he said to the Ideas Box team: "[The Ideas Box] will affect how I do in school. Well, in school I don't really raise my hand...I'm kind of shy. But at the Ideas Box you get experience talking – sharing your ideas. So now in school I might be more comfortable talking.

**2.**

The Ideas Box created a comfortable and convenient space for adults to access professional development tools. LWB's needs assessment found that many unemployed adults in the neighborhood did not have access to computer or to the Internet, did not know how to use

a word processor, and did not have professional mentors to provide feedback on how to present their experiences in a professional way. Ken, an unemployed parent, updated his resume and applied online for jobs as a truck driver through the Ideas Box. Marco, a passerby, designed and printed fliers to promote his headlight restoration business.

**3.**

The Ideas Box created a flexible and dynamic space for discussion and collaboration. Games such as chess, checkers, dominoes, connect four, play-doh, and more were a good entry to discussion and created a social space of encounter across age, race, and gender lines. One of the most successful workshops was a 3-day documentary film workshop led by three professional filmmakers, which guided kids to brainstorm and create a participatory documentary. The group chose bullying as the topic for the documentary, and also learned how to ask questions as interviewers, respond thoughtfully as interviewees, and use video cameras and other equipment. ■



*““[The Bronx] is really rich in terms of culture, and history and heritage. Oftentimes what's lacking is access to opportunity, especially for literacy and digital access—and especially in the summer.”.”*

Tim Lord, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of DreamYard

*Wall Street Journal, “A Box of Tools to StirMinds in the Bronx”*



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All donations to Libraries Without Borders are tax deductible. Our Employment Identification Number

## **VOLUNTEER**

LWB US relies on volunteers to support our work. Please visit our website to learn more about how to become a volunteer.

## **RAISE MONEY**

Help us host a fundraiser or launch a fundraising campaign. Our supporters have hosted ticketed events with proceeds for LWB US, asked for birthday and anniversary gifts in the form of donations to LWB US, and run races to raise awareness

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Join our e-list to stay up to date on programs and services, and to participate in our ongoing advocacy campaigns to increase resources dedicated to knowledge and culture-based support in disaster relief and economic development.





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