FOOD ACTIVISM

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United Bronx Parents (UBP) became food activists in January of 1969 after parents approached UBP founder Evelina Antonetty to complain about the terrible quality of the public school lunch in the South Bronx. Antonetty understood that food activism was a means to an end. It was a method to bring poverty-stricken Bronx families into the citywide struggle for community control. It was a path towards securing good, culturally appropriate, nutritious food for their schools. Therefore, Antonetty worked with UBP's organizers, Ellen Lurie and Kathy Goldman, to begin New York City's first sustained grassroots campaign to improve school lunch.

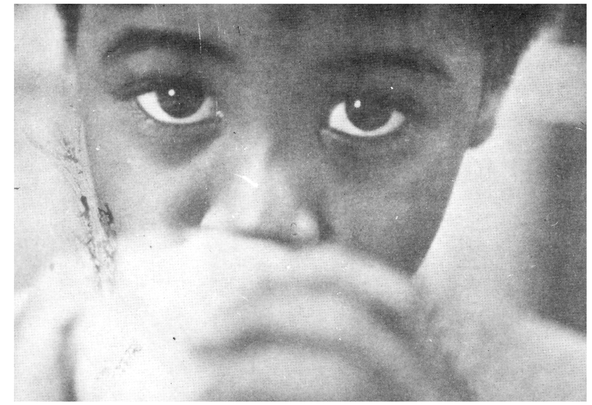
The women organized parental visits to evaluate lunchrooms in twenty-five South Bronx schools. They issued a report to the Bureau of School Lunch to present the agency's findings. Later, the situation was brought to the public forefront when the bureau responded to UBP's report indifferently. Antonetty used the political connections she gained from her extensive anti-poverty campaign and education activism to organize a public official's luncheon at the UBP headquarters. The invitees included State Senator Robert Garcia, City Counselor Robert Lebron, staffers from the office of Congressman James Scheuer, and representatives from the mayor, the borough president, and the governor's office. The delegation drove through a demonstration which consisted of hundreds of parents posted outside P.S. 25 and then passed a press conference attended by local reporters. Upon arrival, the UBP ushered the elected officials and representatives onto a school bus the UBP rented for the occasion, where they served the delegation the same food served to students in South Bronx public school cafeterias.

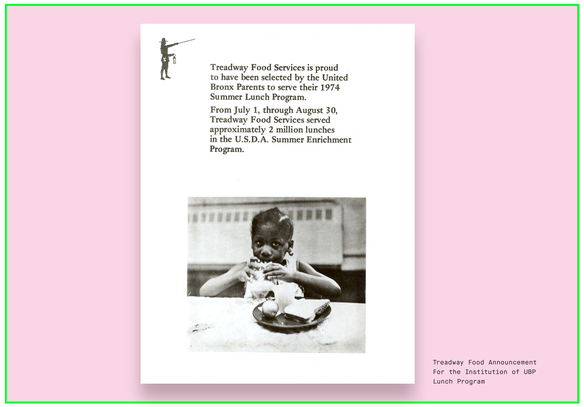
In subsequent months, South Bronx parents attempted to improve the quality of school lunches through innovative strategies and tactics. The parents hired local chefs to create a demonstration of high-quality, delicious school lunches that could serve as an alternative to the current school lunch items. The lunch menu they demonstrated featured typical dishes from Puerto Rican and Black communities and was more cost-effective to produce than the everyday lunches served in public schools. These parents met with Bureau of School Lunch officials to discuss alternative solutions. They also traveled to confront the bureau's officials at national school food conferences and to provide accurate information to conference attendees when necessary. In a dramatic protest against school food waste, South Bronx Parents dumped garbage bags filled with uneaten school lunches in front of the United States Department of Agriculture Headquarters in downtown Manhattan.

Ultimately, South Bronx parents could not revolutionize public school food within the framework of community control due to intractable bureaucracy, and their campaign ended in December 1970. Despite the lack of material success, the campaign gave parents valuable organizing experience and equipped United Bronx Parents with the knowledge and expertise for future food-related efforts. Evelina Antonetty's charismatic leadership and connections were central to UBP's ability to involve these politicians. Many were eager to support her efforts because they understood the depth of her community's support.

Their next campaign commenced in the summer of 1971 in response to the city's refusal to administer a new free summer meals program established by the federal government. UBP assumed responsibility for feeding New York City's school-aged children while school was out. They became the sole sponsor of the largest summer lunch program in the country. They produced six million lunches to feed an average of 150,000 children daily in the five boroughs. The following year the program provided lunch for over 250,000 New York City children. Consistent with UBP's commitment to economic justice, the lunches were prepared by South Bronx residents who received living wages for their labor. Although the federal war on poverty was winding down by the early 1970s, UBP emerged as one of New York City's most respected and influential grassroots anti-poverty agencies. UBP's summer meals program served as a model for cities across the United States.

"NO WORDS ARE NECESSARY"

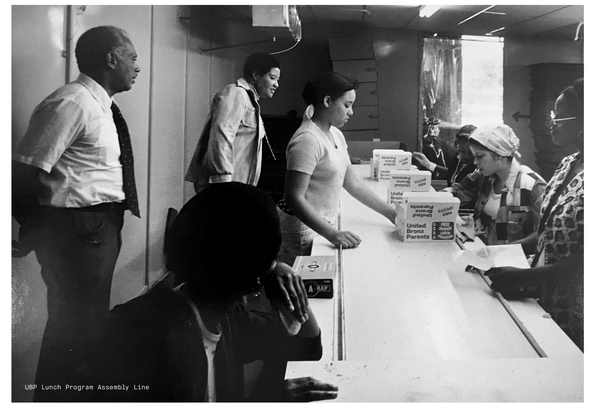




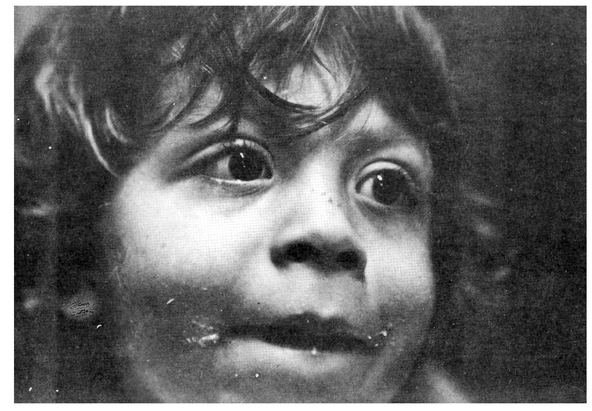
Treadway Food Services is proud to have been selected by the United Bronx Parents to serve their 1974 Summer Lunch Program.

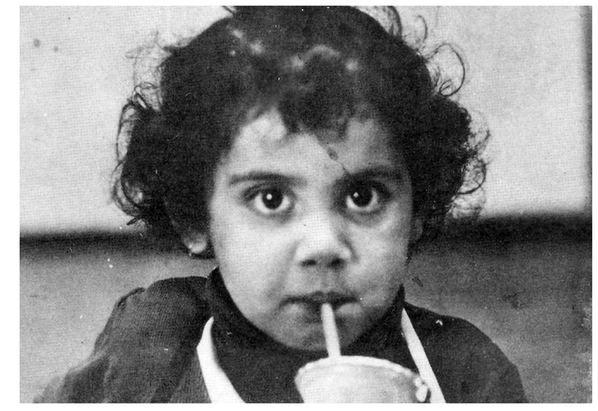
From July 1, through August 30, Treadway Food Services served approximately 2 million lunches in the U.S.D.A. Summer Enrichment Program.

Treadway Food Announcement For the Institution of UBP Lunch Program



UBP Lunch Program Assembly Line

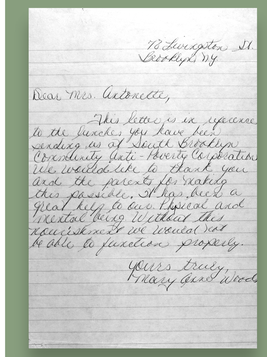




IN HER OWN WORDS

(scan QR codes to hear audio files)

- "WE DUMPED TRASH BAGS FULL OF LUNCH MEALS ON FEDERAL PLAZA"
- "WE FED 300 THOUSANDS CHILDREN EVERY DAY"
- "WE KNOW OUR PEOPLE NEED JOBS"

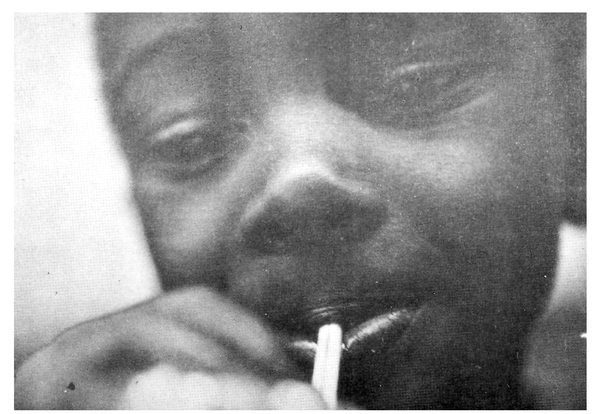


75 Lexington St.
Brooklyn N.Y.

Dear Mrs. Antonetty,

This letter is in reference to the lunches you have been sending in at South Brooklyn Community Anti-Poverty Corporation. We would like to thank you and the people by making this possible. It has been a great help to our children and mental being. Without this experience we would not be able to function properly.

Yours truly
Mary Ann Woods

Thank you letter from MaryAnn Woods

Evelina distributing leftover lunch items to the community