

Fans of WordPress Meet To Celebrate 15 Years Of Content Management

By KARA JILLIAN BROWN

Two bloggers, an insurance salesman, a husband-and-wife duo who run a nonprofit and a business student gathered on a rainy Sunday morning. They were members of an unlikely party of several dozen at the Le Pain Quotidien on Broadway and East 11th Street, seated at a long table set with white linens and potted orchids. They had come together to celebrate an anniversary.

This crowd, many of them strangers, were celebrating the anniversary of WordPress.

Winstina Hughes, one of the organizers, joined the WordPress community when she began a blog called “A Perfectly Planned Town,” which focused on city planning. For her, a blog can extend from the web to real life.

“The software brought us here for brunch,” Ms. Hughes

A group of strangers meet in New York, united in their love for software.

said. “Creating that blog made it possible for me to meet with people one-on-one.”

Dozens of groups held meet-ups all around the world to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the content management system on May 27, and they will continue to do so in the coming weeks.

Lisa Leid, who organized the event with Ms. Hughes, said the WordPress community is tight-knit, and there are always people available help. Though Sunday’s brunch was focused on celebration, it also included a bit of problem solving.

Avi and Peggy Farah began a nonprofit called the BTF Movement, which aims to strengthen the conversations families have about drugs. The

nonprofit followed the May 2018 fatal overdose of their son Benjamin Tofik Farah.

While showing others their website, some noticed that on the mobile version, a few icons on the homepage were layered on top of each other. Kelly James, an insurance salesman who runs his own site called Integrated Senior Benefits, was able to give the Farahs a solution.

It is friendly and educational interactions like these that draw Mr. Kelly to meetups.

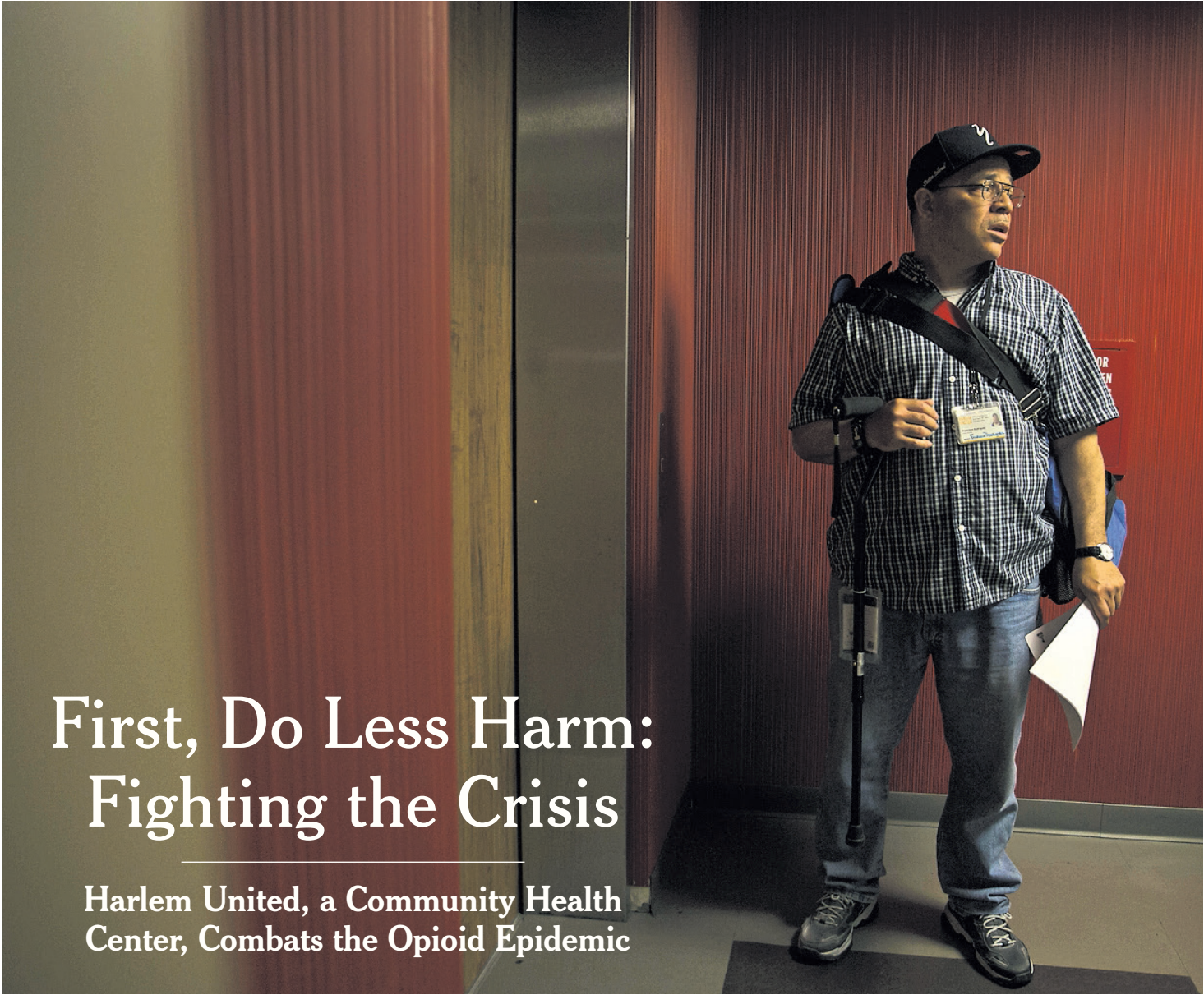
“I was looking to meet people who probably knew more than I did, see if I could pick their brain a little bit,” he said. “And then help people who needed my help.”

This anniversary celebrations began just ahead of the introduction of a new editing interface, called Gutenberg, WordPress, says the new editor is meant to be more user-friendly. It allows users to customize their sites without having to code by using drag-and-drop blocks, making the experience more tactile.

Mr. Farah said he is looking forward to the update, but is a wary of how it will affect existing websites like his own. He remains optimistic and said he believes that through Gutenberg, WordPress will remain one of the leading content management programs.

Ms. Hughes, who has been a WordPress meetup organizer since 2016, appreciates being a part of the WordPress family and said that it will always be a part of her.

“Once you realize that this is a very welcoming space and it doesn’t matter whether or not you’re in WordPress for fun, whether it’s your career, that you can always be a part of the community in any capacity that you want to,” Ms. Hughes said. “You know, then it kind of empowers you to stay.”



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEJANDRA O’CONNELL-DOMENECH/NYT INSTITUTE

First, Do Less Harm: Fighting the Crisis

Harlem United, a Community Health Center, Combats the Opioid Epidemic

By JANAYA GREENE

In the summer of 1996, Will Robertson was in the Five Points neighborhood of Atlanta when he noticed a woman whose walk was familiar to him. He grabbed her by the shoulder and yelled, “Why’d the hell you lie to me? Why’d you make me think that you were dead?”

The woman, unaware that her stride had reminded Mr. Robertson of his wife, who had recently died, and also unaware that he was high on crack cocaine, gave him a hug in return.

This was how Mr. Robertson’s journey to Harlem United began, he said.

Founded in a church basement during the height of the H.I.V./AIDS epidemic in 1988, Harlem United has worked to help black and brown communities in crisis; today, many of its clients struggle with opioid addiction. The organization was an early adopter of harm reduction programs, like needle exchanges. Harm reduction practices attempt to reduce the negative effects of drug use first, before introducing clients to additional resources to help lessen their drug dependency over time.

With the advent of the syringe exchange programs, users with H.I.V./AIDS dropped to less than one percent of the drug injection population, according to Mary Brewster, director of harm reduction services at Harlem United.

Mr. Robertson said he had moved to Atlanta to put the pain of losing his wife and child in an accident behind him. While he was there, his parents died, within a year of each other. A Brooklyn native, he returned to the city in 2006, but didn’t arrive at Harlem United until 2013, still struggling with drug use, but wanting help. “One minute you have a big family, the next you have nobody,” said Mr. Robertson, 58. Programs he had tried before had taken the Tough Love approach, he said.

“They called me a bad person. I was never a bad person, I was just a person going through something,” he said. “Harlem United didn’t want to leave me where I was at. This program helped me to talk about what I was going through.”

Today, Mr. Robertson works as a peer educator helping people who are struggling as he did.

As H.I.V./AIDS rates have declined, Harlem United has adjusted its use of resources. What was once only a syringe exchange service, now offers free fentanyl detection strips, overdose prevention training, AIDS prevention education, supplies for hormone and drug injection,

sex worker safety training, housing services and more.

Mr. Robertson says his clients remind him of himself. Though Harlem’s black population is declining, and the public face of the opioid crisis nationwide has mostly been young white adults, most opioid users at Harlem United are older, black men.

“When I talk to some of my clients in this room, I try to reach the core of the problem of what they’re going through,” Mr. Robertson said. “Say one of my clients don’t have their G.E.D., I have a connection down the block. I’ll say, ‘Let’s go work on your G.E.D., but while you work on your G.E.D., instead of shooting up this much, let’s do a little less.’”

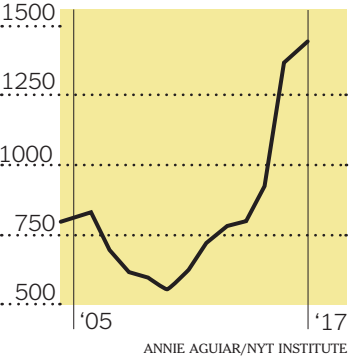
During the crack epidemic, many urban law enforcement officials adopted the rhetoric of former President Richard M. Nixon’s so-called war on drugs, which criminalized drug users. Some health advocates suggest that increased support for harm reduction models today has only been possible because of the current epidemic’s reach into white communities.

“This is a health issue now,” said Francisco Rodriguez, 56, a policy advocate for Harlem United. “When you look at the white population, it’s hitting their back door now. It’s in their backyards. So it went from a criminal act, to a health issue. That’s because the people who have the money deemed it necessary.”

In New York City, 1,441 people

Unintentional Overdose Deaths

New York City, 2000-2017



ANNIE AGUIAR/NYT INSTITUTE
Source: Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

died of overdoses in 2017 — the deadliest year on record. The health department does not provide a demographic breakdown of the victims, citing privacy concerns.

Studies and public health officials say they have found success with safe drug consumption sites in cities in Europe and Canada. The New York City Health Commissioner, Mary Travis Bassett, has supported the idea. Mayor Bill de Blasio publicly supported a pilot program for safe injection sites as a strategy to lessen opioid use and overdose deaths in the city. But both are just catching up with Harlem United, which has supported methods like this for nearly 30 years.

Mr. Rodriguez’s work involves

Francisco Rodriguez, 56, a wellness advocate and peer educator at Harlem United, a community health center, prepares to set out for Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem.

lobbying politicians to pass legislation in support of harm reduction measures on behalf of Harlem United. He and Mr. Robertson helped push New York City Council Bill 1443, which requires homeless shelters to offer naloxone training for employees, among other things.

Though many harm reduction organizations advocate for legally recognized safe consumption sites, public health workers say the sites are not an end-all. They are, health workers say, just another harm reduction option.

Mr. Rodriguez said Mayor de Blasio’s public support for safe injection sites is a win, but he said he was not convinced that the pilot program will be successful.

Outside researchers will study the effectiveness of the facilities. To Mr. Rodriguez, the involvement of outside researchers is questionable.

“Everybody here knows about harm reduction, this is what we do, he said. “I’ve gone into shooting galleries, during the day time, trying to reach people. I can identify what the community looks like.”

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Mosi Eagle, a field coordinator and site supervisor for Harlem United, hands out free condoms.

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