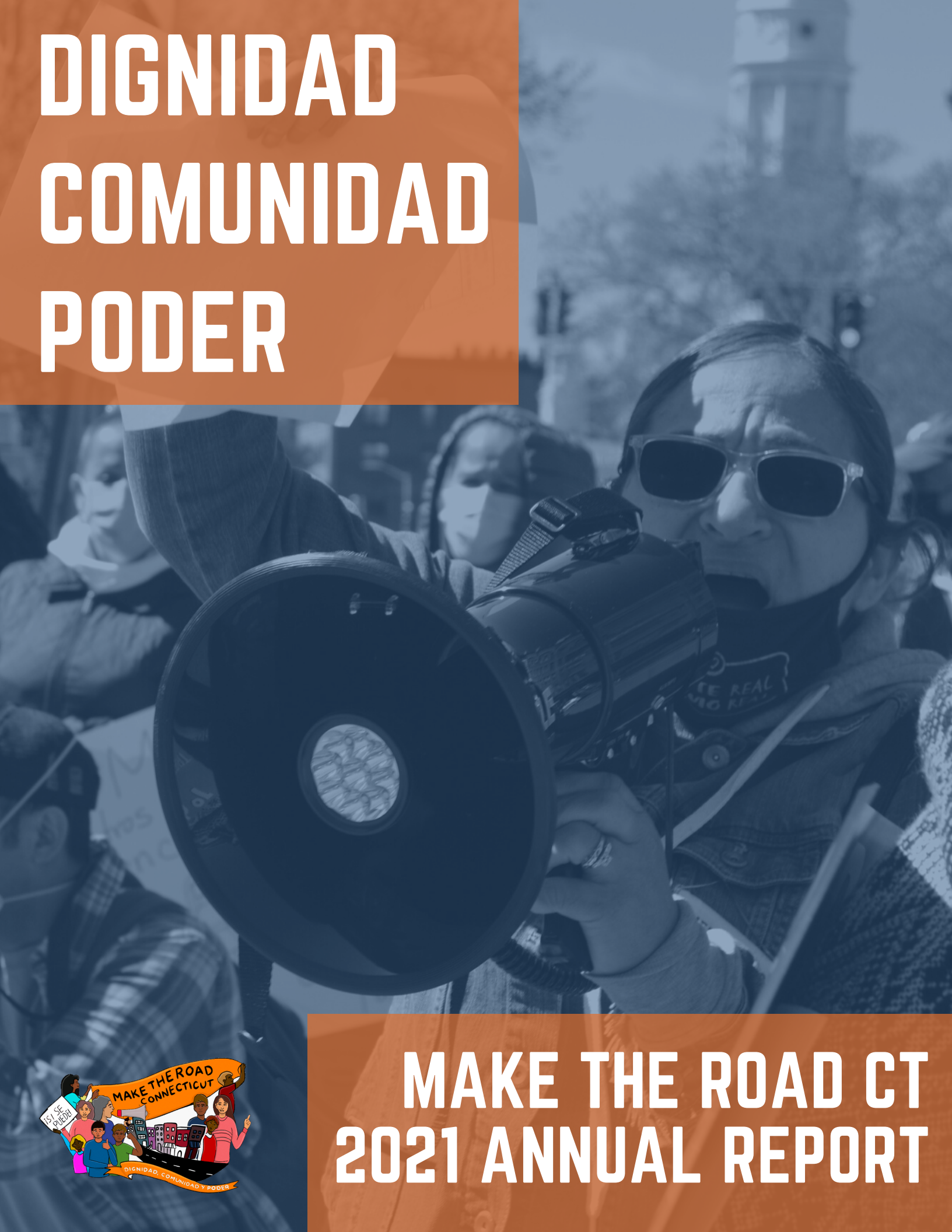


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PODER**



**MAKE THE ROAD CT  
2021 ANNUAL REPORT**





# A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Resilience. Perseverance. Determination. Those are some of the words that many would use to describe what it took to get through 2021.

Yet using these terms as a catch-all to describe our collective experience misses the mark. Resilience is defined as "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness." Our people, our communities have not recovered quickly from this pandemic due to the systems that have either actively sought to harm them or did nothing to help. The lack of stimulus checks for undocumented community members, the lack of access to health insurance, the continuation of aggressive and violent border policies have exacerbated ways the government and other institutions were already failing our people. Our communities deserve better. Our people deserve to live in a world where systems are in place that have resources available in good times and when times get rough; that allow everyone to live with dignity and respect. That is why we fight. That is why we organize.

This year we continued to breathe that new world into existence through our organizing work. We relished in the short periods when the virus subsided and we were able to meet together, in-person, with social distancing, masks, and an average of one hand sanitizer per-person. When cases of the virus spiked we continued our organizing virtually, kept regular contact with our leaders, and connected members to resources as needs came up. This has not been easy. Keeping relationships alive takes a lot of time and energy. Some of our members have understandably needed to prioritize jobs, family, and other responsibilities. This is a reflection of the momentum towards a return to a normal that never existed in the first place. We must resist that urge, as "normal" meant lack of access to quality healthcare for our undocumented community members, an immigration system more focused on deportations than humanity, and a school system more focused on disciplining youth than listening to them.

In 2022, we will continue to challenge this normal. We won access to Husky health insurance for children under 9 and those who are pregnant during pregnancy and a year after childbirth. We will not stop until that access is expanded to everyone. Our staff helped distribute over \$600,000 to undocumented renters in Bridgeport and Hartford. We will not stop until everyone has a safe, quality, affordable place to live. Our advocacy resulting in the opening of a Newcomer Arrival Center in Bridgeport Public Schools to provide support to non-English speaking and newly arriving parents. We will not stop until all students have access to an equitable and fully-resourced education. To do this, we need funders that invest deeply and sustainably in Black and Brown led community organizations pushing for policy change. We need allies ready to stand with us as our members fight for the dignity and respect they deserve.

We hope you will join us in creating a world where this new normal is possible.

In solidarity,

*Barbara Lopez*





# WHO WE ARE

## OUR MISSION

Make the Road CT (MRCT) is an intergenerational member-led community-based organization working to build power in immigrant, Latine, and working-class communities in Connecticut to achieve dignity and justice. We do this through community organizing, legal and survival services, transformative education, and policy innovation.

## OUR VISION

MRCT envisions communities where Black, Brown, immigrant, indigenous, and working-class people are treated with dignity and respect and have equitable access to housing, healthcare, education, and other systems and resources. We see children playing, neighbors sharing food, dancing, laughing, being healthy, and building strong connections to not just live but to thrive. We trust the power of organizing and fighting back against inequities, sexism, institutional racism, and all the other isms that exist in our society to deliver the changes and build the new systems our community needs.

# A LOOK BACK AT 2021

## Opening of Newcomer Arrival Center

Our leaders celebrated a huge victory in August with the opening of the Newcomer Arrival Center for Bridgeport Public Schools. Our leaders had been advocating for years to open a center like this and will be working with the district to ensure parents are able to get the information and resources they need at the new center.



## Protest in Washington D.C. for Citizenship

Fighting for citizenship for all was a rollercoaster this past year with our members going down to Washington DC to demand a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented people living in the United States. Elected officials tried to play politics with us but we kept our message strong and held them accountable for pushing as hard as they could to include as many people as possible in any immigration reform.



## Legal Clinic

We held our first virtual immigration legal clinic in 2021. We had 6 lawyers meet with 23 members 1:1 to answer questions about their immigration cases. We know how difficult and expensive it is to get connected to immigration attorneys. Therefore, we felt it was vital to continue providing this resource for members in a virtual format.

## Nuestras Voces Committee

We know the importance of being engaged civically not just through voting but through understanding how to navigate local and state government institutions, and how to hold elected officials accountable. A core group of 10 members went through a series of civic engagement political education workshops to be better informed and to think together about how Make the Road can deepen our civic engagement work in the state.

## May Day

Our members led a large rally outside the Federal Building at 450 Main Street in Hartford on International Workers Day (May Day). Our members shared stories of what it has been like to be undocumented workers throughout the pandemic and demanded a pathway to citizenship, stronger worker protections, and healthcare for all regardless of immigration status.



## Husky Campaign

Our members worked as part of a powerful coalition pushing for access to Husky Health Insurance, a state medicaid insurance program, for all community members regardless of immigration status. They attended public hearings, rallied outside the Capital, and won access for children under 9 years old and people that are pregnant during pregnancy through a year after childbirth.



## Bilingual Education Forum

Our parent leaders held a forum for parents across the state with the State Department of Education (CSDE) about their rights as parents who don't speak English, are newly arrived, or with students in ESL and bilingual classes. Parents from Bridgeport, Willimantic, New Haven, Hartford, and more shared their stories and Dr. Labas from CSDE discussed ways to ensure the rights of parents are respected within schools.

## Statewide Membership Assembly

Over 40 of our members joined us for our annual statewide membership assembly. Our members reflected on our work in 2021, gave feedback on organizational goals for 2022 and enjoyed sharing space with many people they had not seen for several months.

## Resilience & Hope Fundraiser

2021 saw the return of our annual fundraiser, albeit virtually. We celebrated all our accomplishments for the year, danced some salsa, and awarded 4 of our dedicated members with our Hope and Resilience Award. You can read about our awardees later in this report.

## Summer Youth Academy

Our youth coordinator Mwiche ran an engaging and powerful Summer Youth Academy for 9 young people from Bridgeport. The 6-week-long program focused on learning about the school to prison pipeline, climate justice, and other issues impacting Bridgeport residents. The program culminated with a final project related to an issue the young people were passionate about.



## Rental Assistance

Soon after the pandemic started, Make the Road joined a broad coalition of groups fighting for rent relief and support for undocumented people in the state. Together, we were able to successfully advocate for rental relief funds specifically for undocumented families. Make the Road became one of the organizations processing applications and assisting in the distribution of those funds. Since late 2020 we have helped distribute over \$600,000 in rent relief to families in Bridgeport and Hartford.

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT BY THE NUMBERS

One of the core pillars of Make the Road is the leadership development for our members. Over the course of the year we provide various training opportunities for our members to learn and grow. **This year over 200 members participated in trainings including:**

- **50** Members Trained in Phone Banking, Story of Self, Campaign Development, 1:1s, and Public Speaking
- **30** Members trained in new immigration policies impacting the CT immigrant community
- **30** Members trained in Housing Know Your Rights
- **30** Members trained in Healthcare Know Your Rights
- **25** Members trained in Local, State and Federal Government systems and structures
- **16** Members trained in the basics of Husky Health Insurance
- **15** Members Trained in Bilingual Education Policies
- **10** Members trained in How to navigate the Healthcare System
- **10** Members trained in Healthcare Advocacy
- **9** Youth Members trained in Political Education, Environmental Justice, How the School Budget works and Community Organizing skills





# HEALTHCARE FOR ALL



"I got involved in this medical care campaign because members of my family and I have suffered discrimination by not knowing our rights. We have faced many barriers when seeking medical care when we get sick. I believe in the importance and urgency of having a protection or benefit so that each person has the right to see a doctor, to have better health care, and to prevent long-term illness."

-Nidia Marín  
BPT Fightback Committee Leader

"I am Colombian and have been living in CT with my family for about a year. I am a part of the Healthcare Committee because throughout history it has been proven that 'Unity is strength,' and together we can generate enough noise to achieve legislative change that allows for the fulfillment of our basic rights including access to healthcare, regardless of immigration status."

-Adriana Velasquez  
HFD Fightback Committee  
Leader

The Migration Policy Institute estimates that almost 60% of undocumented immigrants in Connecticut do not have health insurance. For years we have been fighting to expand access to quality healthcare for members of our community regardless of their immigration status. **Last Spring we got a law passed that will make a dent in that number.** Starting this year, Husky Health Insurance, the state medicaid insurance program in Connecticut, will be **available to all children under 9 years old regardless of their immigration status and those that are pregnant** during their pregnancy and one year after giving birth. This is a huge win that was the result of hundreds of community members sharing their stories, calling their legislators, and rallying outside the Capitol. **However, the fight is not over!**

This year, we will be working to make quality, affordable healthcare a reality in 2 ways. First, we will **push for everyone to be included in the Husky Health Insurance Program regardless of immigration status.** There are tens of thousands of undocumented residents over the age of 8 that need health insurance too. We also will be **working at a local level to ensure that our hospitals and clinics are responding to the needs of our immigrant and non-English speaking community** through proposed changes to interpretation access, clearer information on emergency funding and discount programs, inclusion of community members in advisory councils, and pushing for an equity-based approach to setting new policies.

# BILINGUAL EDUCATION EQUITY



"The reason why I am involved in this campaign is because I believe that it is vitally important for us as parents to know what is happening with our children's education. My daughter is currently in 7th grade and the information I get is always in English, only the director speaks Spanish but she rarely communicates with me. I believe that this Campaign will help us parents to better understand the progress of our children and thus be able to help them better.

-Mireyza Gomez  
Madres en Acción Parent Leader



In 2019 our members created the One City, Many Languages campaign in response to surveys and conversations with parents that showed many non-English speaking and newly arriving parents were unaware of what resources were available to them and their children. Since then, **our parent leaders have been fighting to get more resources and support from the district.** Our leaders have held rallies, met with the superintendent, organized parents, held forums, and did research on ways to better support students and parents in the city without the district committing to the kind of support our leaders needed.

**Finally this summer, WE WON!** Bridgeport Public Schools **committed resources and opened the Newcomer Arrival Center**, a space focused on helping new arrival and non-English speaking parents navigate the Bridgeport School System. **The Center will serve as a one-stop-shop** to get students registered, get students tested and placed in classes, and get connected to community resources such as transportation and access to healthcare. Our parent leaders will be working with the school district to ensure the center provides the support and resources it is intended to. They are also **working with state legislators to implement a Parents' Bill of Rights for CT English Language Learners** through this legislative session so parents all over the state know their rights and can get the resources they need from their schools.

**"The participation of parents in our children's education is important so that we know our rights. We need parents to get involved in schools to ensure that they are providing positive results for our children.**

-Xiomara De La Cruz  
Madres Guerreras Parent Leader





# CITIZENSHIP FOR ALL



"Being a part of MRCT is important to me because, MRCT fought against ICE and I feared that one day when I wasn't around, ICE would come to my house and without warning arrest my mother. To me, it was good that Make The Road was doing training on your rights and that I had an ally to reach out to if anything happened.

-Charlie Hernandez  
MRCT Youth Leader

Immigration was in the news a lot in 2021. Biden attempted to roll back some of the Trump-era immigration policies while leaving some of the most damaging ones in place. **Congress debated and ultimately failed to include immigration reform in any pieces of legislation.** More people arrived at the border driven by violence, natural disasters, and the economic, social, and health impacts of the pandemic only to be met with immigration policies that severely limit the opportunity for any of them to get into the country, including asylum seekers.

These challenges and dehumanization have weighed heavily on our community. That is why our members have been **pushing hard locally and nationally for nothing less than citizenship for all undocumented people in the United States.** We held rallies outside the offices of our Congress People demanding they take action. We had zoom meetings with our senators getting commitments from them to continue fighting for a pathway to citizenship despite the challenges. We went down to D.C. and marched alongside thousands of people to make our voices heard. 2022 is sure to bring more debates around immigration. **Our members will continue raising their voices to ensure our elected officials prioritize creating a pathway to citizenship, ending detention and deportation, and a shift to a humanitarian border policy this year.**

# SUMMER YOUTH ACADEMY



"[In the Summer program] I learned that there is a lot we can do and talk about as a group. I also learned many things about our city that [I] probably never noticed."

-Brian Ramirez  
Youth Summer Program Participant



The 2020-2021 school year was difficult for teachers and students alike. Some students were in-person, some were virtual. Some students were taking care of siblings while parents worked while others were working to support their families. All of this made engaging young people in out-of-school activities that much more difficult. We decided to do recruitment to bring new young people to Make the Road for a **6-week long Summer Youth Academy that would give them a space to connect with each other, learn about the work that we do as an organization, and learn how to make change in their neighborhoods.**

The program was a huge success. **We had 9 students consistently attend and complete the program** which included 2 program sessions per week as well as a group project related to a community issue participants were passionate about. Some chose getting police out of schools, some chose climate justice, some chose immigration justice. The participants learned leadership skills such as how to talk to their peers about the issues that they care about, how to recruit more people to be engaged, and how to run an organizing campaign to push for local policy changes. The program concluded with a celebration and graduation ceremony at the Burroughs Community Center. **Some of the young people involved in the program have continued to come to meetings to this day.** We look forward to providing more similar opportunities for our youth committee in 2022.



# HOUSING JUSTICE



## RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

OVER \$600,000 DISTRIBUTED  
OVER 280 FAMILIES SUPPORTED

\*\*\*PROGRAM SUPPORTED IMMIGRANT FAMILIES THAT DID NOT RECEIVE HELP FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



"The most frustrating part of my work was discovering once again that the systems in place don't work for the majority of Brown and Black communities, and that this structure was created to oppress and abuse us. Our community needs to pay exorbitant legal fees to fight for their human rights and, as essential workers, are at the same time disproportionately underpaid and exploited, facing food and housing insecurity with little to no safety net.

-Teresa Quintana  
Housing Equity Organizer

Finding safe and affordable housing has been an issue for many in our community for years, but the pandemic has brought the issue of housing to a crisis level. **Tens of thousands of renters in CT are still behind on their rent and may face eviction.** State rental assistance money is running out and renters may soon lose the extra pandemic protections they had under emergency actions by the governor. Our housing equity organizer, Teresa, spoke to hundreds of community members facing these very issues and has been both heartbroken by their stories and motivated by their commitment to fight for a change.

Over the past year, Make the Road has been part of a group of organizations assisting with the application and distribution of rental assistance money specifically for undocumented tenants. We have **submitted rental assistance applications totaling over \$600,000 for over 280 families in Bridgeport and Hartford.** When talking to community members, we heard from many about the substandard housing conditions they are living in. From mold to insects to rats to appliances not getting fixed, community members are living in conditions that no person should have to live in. It is dehumanizing. That is where our organizing comes in. **In 2022 we are organizing tenants in buildings owned by especially unresponsive national corporations** that have been identified as "slumlords" to hold these corporations accountable and **push for policies that will allow everyone to live in a space that is safe, comfortable, and affordable.**

**At MRCT we learn about our rights. This organization always keeps us informed about important things in our community and how we can solve something that happens to us. Here I feel safe and accompanied.**

-Mireyza Gomez, Member Leader



**"I am a person who likes to learn and I believe that [MRCT] is the best place to do so. Also here I feel that I can express myself freely without fear of being judged by anyone because everyone here understands me since they have also gone through similar things. It is a place where I feel safe.**

-Erika Andrade, Member Leader



**"I like what [MRCT] does because they fight to improve our lives and support each other. In the workshops I learned to open my eyes and fight for my rights as an immigrant and that we are not alone in this fight, that there are organizations like MRCT and community that care about what immigrant communities experience on a daily basis.**

-Gaby Moncado, Member Leader

# MEET OUR AWARDEES



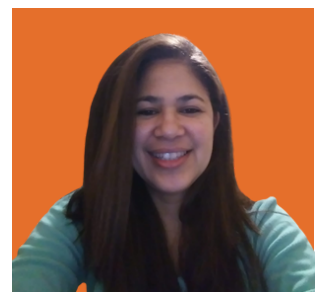
Hope and resilience. That was the theme of our annual fundraiser, held in November, meant to hold the dual reality that we as an organization and our members continue to face challenges while also having hope for the future. At the fundraiser, we honored four members that truly embodied the spirit of hope and resilience through their dedication to the work of Make the Road. These members helped lead campaigns, conversations, showed up to meetings and actions, and helped others stay connected to and get involved in the work that we do. Please join us in a round of applause for our awardees!

**Minerva Antigua** joined MRCT in 2019 because she found Madres en Acción a place to advocate for a better education for her son and all students. She has spoken at city council meetings asking for more funding to go towards schools, wrote an op ed directed at Mayor Ganim addressing the lack of funding to schools, and has testified at BOE meetings about improving bilingual education. Minerva was nominated because of her commitment to our vision and her passion to continue working on the One City, Many Languages campaign to improve bilingual education for every student in Bridgeport.

**Nidia Marín** has been involved in the Fight Back Committee since 2018 when she started attending meetings and participating in events. She has testified on Husky 4 All in front of legislators, led research meetings, called members during phone banking sessions, traveled to DC to advocate for a Pathway to Citizenship, and so much more. She is a truly positive presence, always motivating others to continue fighting even in difficult times. She inspires others to join the fight to make a change in our community on the issues that matter most.

**Brian Ramirez** is 15 years old and attends Platt Technical High School. He got involved with Make The Road CT through our Summer Youth Academy this past summer and has been a very active member, consistently showing up to meetings, preparing testimony about his experience with the lack of transportation in Bridgeport for Board of Education meetings, and canvassing with MRCT to get the word out about our work.

**Maria Adela** is from Venezuela, and currently lives in the city of Hartford. She got involved with Madres Guerreras because she identifies herself as a mother warrior who will raise her voice for the benefit of her children in the school system and in the community. She was nominated because of her commitment, her contributions to our campaigns, and the positive energy she brings to the spaces she is in.





# MEET OUR STAFF TEAM

2021 was a year of continuing to develop the staff team needed to lead our organization into the next phase of our growth in building power, holding elected leaders accountable, developing leadership of our members, and connecting community members to resources they most need. We hired four new staff during 2021 that have added capacity and strength to our organizing work. We have plans to continue to grow our team in 2022 and deepen the staff relationships that are so vital to the success of our work.



Staff Members from left to right:

[top row] Mwiche Siwingwa - Youth Coordinator, Wendy Cárdenas - Lead Organizer, Barbara López - Director, Teresa Quintana - Housing Equity Organizer  
[middle row] Helen Quiñonez - Parent Coordinator, Stefan Keller - Development Associate, Bianca Noroñas - Hartford Fightback Organizer, Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Smith - Senior Programs and Development Manager  
[bottom row] Megan Scharrer - Hartford Community Organizer, Sonia Hernandez - Bridgeport Fightback Organizer, Leida Ramos - Office Maintainer

# LOOKING AHEAD

## Strategic Planning

Here at Make the Road we are entering year 2 of a 3-year strategic planning process led by our members and staff and informed by our allies and collaborators that we organize with. This strategic plan will help to guide our work over the next 5 years. As part of this strategic planning process, we asked our members to fill out a survey to give us feedback and to better understand how they would like to see Make the Road grow in the future. As you will see below our members responded in regards to the need for Make the Road to provide direct services that would compliment our organizing work, to lead civic engagement efforts focused on turning people out to vote and holding elected officials accountable, and to continue our work in the areas of education equity, healthcare access, housing justice, and immigrant justice.

## Direct Service Complimenting our Organizing Work

A core part of the Make the Road model is providing support for people to connect to and navigate the system while politicizing and engaging them to organize and advocate for better policies. We asked our members what types of services we should offer and the responses highlighted and complemented our organizing work. Members rated support in navigating the healthcare system and the public school system as the highest priority. Other services that members also rated as important included understanding workplace rights and protections, understanding various benefits available to immigrant families, Spanish practice for youth, ESL classes, and providing college information. We are already in the beginning stages of envisioning a program that compliments our healthcare organizing in the form of promotoras or healthcare navigators. These would be people from the community trained to help immigrant and low-income people get the healthcare information, resources, and services they need. We have seen how difficult it is to figure how to get proper treatment when English is not your first language, when you don't have insurance, and when discrimination exists in the system. These navigators would help people move through the system while also noting barriers to access that our organizing work can push to change. This is the type of complementary relationship we want to build.

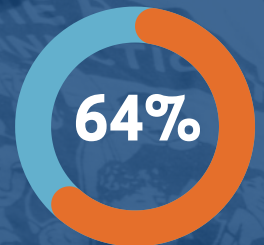
## Membership Survey Results

In our Membership Survey we asked members to rate what direct services they want MTR to provide on a scale of 1-5. The graphs below show the percentage of members that responded 5 (most important) or 4 (very important) for each service.

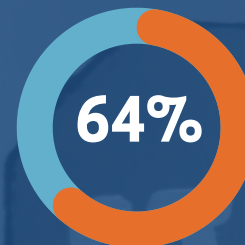
Benefits  
Counselor/  
Navigator



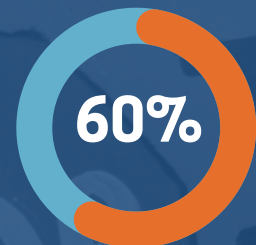
Navigating The  
Public School  
System



Navigating the  
Healthcare  
System



College  
Access  
Support



Spanish  
Practice for  
Youth



Understanding  
Rights in the  
Workplace



# OUR 2022 ORGANIZING PRIORITIES

## **Education Equity**

Our parent leaders will be focused on getting an ESL/bilingual parent bill of rights adopted for all of Connecticut that will ensure that school districts are providing the proper support and resources to bilingual students and families.

## **Healthcare Access**

We, alongside our coalition partners, passed a law to open access to Husky health insurance to a limited group but we will not stop fighting until equitable access to healthcare exists for all members of our community regardless of status. This was not the policy we wanted and we were disappointed in the way that legislators failed to pass something inclusive of everyone. That is why we will be back at the State Capitol advocating for an expanded bill to include all residents of CT this year.

## **Housing Justice**

We know from the hundreds of conversations we had with residents while we were distributing rental assistance that housing is at a crisis point. Many people are still behind on their rent or are stuck in substandard housing situations with no way out. That is why we will be organizing tenants this year to push back against corporate landlords that are buying up properties, raising rents, and letting buildings fall into disrepair.

## **Freedom to Move, Freedom to Stay**

All of the issues we work on are through an intersectional immigrant justice lens. That is because we know that immigrant status in combination with race, class, gender, and other identities make it even harder to navigate the healthcare, housing, and education systems. That is why we will both keep fighting to ensure that all people have the freedom to move where they want or need, the freedom to stay where they feel connected and rooted, and to get the resources and support they need no matter where they are or what immigration status they hold.

## **Civic Engagement**

Connecticut has a reputation for being a progressive state with policies that support immigrant, working-class residents, but our experience has shown that many times this is not the case. For example, it took our organization years to get a Sanctuary City ordinance passed in Bridgeport in 2020 to provide protections to undocumented community members, despite continued resistance from city leaders. That is why our goal in 2022 is to increase civic engagement and participation in statewide and local elections in Hartford and Bridgeport. We will be training our members in voter engagement and civic participation so that they can encourage their friends and neighbors to get engaged as well. We will be canvassing and phone banking to register voters and get them to the polls. We want to ensure that our communities' voices are heard at the ballot box so that their values and priorities are better represented. Beyond voting, we will also be organizing community members to contact and hold our elected officials accountable to advocate for what our community needs. This is how we ensure that Connecticut lives up to its progressive reputation.





# ENGAGE WITH US

## Make a Donation

By Mail:

Make the Road States Inc.  
Att: Make the Road CT  
301 Grove Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11237

Online:

[www.maketheroadct.org](http://www.maketheroadct.org)

## Get Involved

Want to host a fundraiser, join our accompaniment team, or support in another way?

Reach out to us at [info@maketheroadct.org](mailto:info@maketheroadct.org).

## Follow Us

Instagram, Facebook, & Twitter @MaketheRoadCT