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## Make the Road New York: Fifteen Years Fighting for Respect and Dignity, 1997-2012

Make the Road New York

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## Make the Road New York: Fifteen Years Fighting for Respect and Dignity, 1997-2012

### Abstract

[Excerpt] For 15 years, Make the Road New York (MRNY) has fought to ensure respect and dignity for immigrant, poor, and working class New Yorkers.

From our early years working to combine legal services, education, and community organizing in Jackson Heights and Bushwick, we had big dreams about what kind of city and state New York can be. And we had the audacity to believe we could build an organization with the sophistication and muscle to deliver on those dreams.

### Keywords

unions, labor movement, organizing, New York, representation, AFL-CIO

### Comments

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MAKE THE ROAD  
NEW YORK  
15 YEARS  
FIGHTING FOR  
RESPECT &  
DIGNITY  
1997-2012

For 15 years, Make the Road New York (MRNY) has fought to ensure respect and dignity for immigrant, poor, and working class New Yorkers.

From our early years working to combine legal services, education, and community organizing in Jackson Heights and Bushwick, we had big dreams about what kind of city and state New York can be. And we had the audacity to believe we could build an organization with the sophistication and muscle to deliver on those dreams.

Thanks to the tenacity and vision of our 12,000+ members and those who helped us along the way, MRNY has grown into a robust, multiservice powerhouse that works with tens of thousands of New York City and Long Island residents each year.

We've woven together the different strategies necessary to eradicate poverty. We take those tools deep into the neighborhoods where immigrants and low-income New Yorkers live and work. And we deploy those strategies at City Hall, in Albany, and on the national scene to win organizing victories and policy campaigns that improve the lives of hundreds of thousands.

**MRNY delivers for New Yorkers in need.** The devastation in our communities brought on by Hurricane Sandy has compounded problems for tens of thousands of people already barely surviving on low wages, precarious employment, and substandard housing.

We need your help to ensure that all affected families get the direct and ongoing support, legal representation and federal aid needed regardless of immigration status or English ability.

Please visit our website to make your contribution today:  
[www.maketheroadny.org/donate](http://www.maketheroadny.org/donate)

# 2012 VICTORIES

- ◉ Launched a campaign **organizing car wash workers** with New York Communities for Change and the support of the RWDSU. Workers at four car washes have already voted to form unions in one of NYC's most exploitative industries.
- ◉ Won two major policy changes **guaranteeing translation and interpretation**: first at all major pharmacy chains and mail order pharmacies statewide, impacting millions of customers; and then at all Suffolk County government agencies.
- ◉ Won a state **Tenant Protection Unit** to enforce tenants' rights and crack down on lawless landlords.
- ◉ Youth leaders organized to save the critically-needed **Bushwick Community High School**, giving hundreds of over-age and under-credited students a second chance at their education.
- ◉ Launched an **immigration law practice** serving thousands with Deferred Action applications and hundreds more with deportation defense, permanent lawful status, and immigrant services fraud prevention.
- ◉ Mobilized 20,000 new voters on Election Day as part of our new **Campaign for Respect & Dignity**, after **registering 12,000 voters** of color in NYC and Long Island and, with the Center for Popular Democracy, an additional 7,000 in Pennsylvania.
- ◉ Brought national attention to the harmful impact of the NYPD's **stop-and-frisk tactics on transgender New Yorkers** and trained 1,600+ youth and LGBTQ community members about their rights when stopped by the police.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

We unite community members of all ages to tackle poverty and injustice. Our model relies on the leadership, knowledge, and deep commitment of our members. Our 14 permanent organizing committees engage 12,000 members through weekly meetings, strategic campaigns, and large-scale actions. From the ground up, we build broad-reaching coalitions and win meaningful victories that impact millions at the local, state, and national levels.

## HIGH QUALITY SERVICES

We help more than 10,000 individuals each year battle poverty with a program of integrated legal and survival services. Through legal representation in the areas of employment, housing, immigration, and civil rights, our bilingual advocates and attorneys help families address income disruptions and life circumstances to lift themselves out of poverty.

## TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

We build the capacity of 4,000 young people and adults every year through diverse educational programs that interweave literacy, job training, leadership development, civics, and support to access higher education.

## POLICY INNOVATION

We innovate policy solutions to systems that perpetuate and exacerbate poverty. Our legal team and technical experts work closely with our members and clients to identify systemic or recurrent problems, design legislation to change the rules of the game, and shift the balance of power at all levels of government. As we then build campaigns to win and implement policy, we place our communities' voices center stage in the major policy debates of our time.

# OUR STRATEGIES



## RESPECT FOR LGBTQ NEW YORKERS

MRNY combats institutional homophobia, transphobia, job discrimination, hate crimes, and harassment, while promoting LGBTQ inclusion and expression.

- Educated 8,500 high school students with our Safe Schools LGBTQ awareness and anti-bullying curriculum.
- Led community reconciliation and education initiatives after homophobic and anti-immigrant hate crimes.
- Fought systematic LGBTQ discrimination at major retailers and won a landmark campaign to ensure equal opportunities for transgender employees at American Eagle Outfitters.



## HEALTHY HOUSING AND PROTECTION FOR TENANTS

MRNY works to ensure that all tenants can live in healthy and affordable housing.

- Reduced NYC childhood lead poisoning rates by 56% through the toughest anti-lead law in the U.S.
- Won Safe Housing legislation to fix hazardous conditions for thousands of tenants, including mold, rodents, and conditions that trigger asthma—the #1 cause of school absences in NYC.
- Provided legal services to 400 tenants each year to prevent evictions, repair unsafe housing units, and win hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.





### DIGNITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE WORKPLACE

MRNY promotes the right of all workers to a living wage, dignity, and freedom to organize on the job.

- Led the campaign to win the landmark state-level *Wage Theft Prevention Act*, which quadruples penalties for wage theft and protects workers from retaliation, making New York the national leader in the fight against wage theft.
- Won \$15 million in back wages and damages for exploited workers through legal representation.
- Trained 10,000 workers how to stand up for their rights, health and safety on the job.
- Provided job training, certifications and placement to 1,000 people each year.



### ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

MRNY's young people and parents work side by side to fight for all public school students to receive a quality education and to expand resources for English language-learners.



### SAFE COMMUNITIES

MRNY works to ensure that immigrants, people of color and LGBTQ New Yorkers do not have to live in fear of police targeting, deportation, or discrimination.

- Prevented thousands of deportations and family separations each year, through policy change and direct representation.
- Worked with national allies to win "Deferred Action" to grant work permits to 1.5 million undocumented youth.
- Helped build a citywide coalition to end the NYPD's discriminatory stop-and-frisk policies.



### EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

MRNY works to guarantee equal rights, access, and improved healthcare for the 2.5 million New Yorkers with limited English proficiency.

- Improved disease prevention, early detection, and nutrition for 20,000+ community members through direct benefits and health insurance enrollment, HIV testing, and health education.
- Secured the right to translation and interpretation services at all NYC public benefits offices; major public and private hospitals statewide; major chain pharmacies statewide; and City, State, and Suffolk County government agencies.



- Served 2,000 young people with afterschool programming and trained 750 to become core leaders in their communities.
- Helped 14,000 adult students to learn English, computer skills, civics, and earn a GED.
- Piloted NYC's first Student Success Center, helping 1,000+ low-income students apply to college every year, achieving a 75% acceptance rate.
- Opened two high-performing, specialized public high schools for low-income immigrants and students of color.

### CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

MRNY connects disenfranchised communities into our democracy, increasing electoral participation through voter registration, education, and year-round, nonpartisan civic engagement activities.

- Helped 12,000 immigrants become citizens through classes, test prep, and application assistance.
- Registered 20,000 immigrant, Latino, and African American voters.
- Educated and mobilized 55,000 voters in local and national elections.



# MAJOR POLICY VICTORIES

## 2003

NYC Equal Access to Health & Human Services Act

## 2004

NYC Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Act

## 2005

Targeted Cyclical Enforcement Program to Repair NYC's Worst Housing Units

## 2006

Regulations to Guarantee Translation & Interpretation at All NY State Hospitals

## 2007

NYC Safe Housing Act

## 2008

Executive Order 120: Translation & Interpretation at NYC Government Agencies

NYC Tenant Protection Act

## 2009

NYC Language Access in Pharmacies Act

## 2010

NY State Wage Theft Prevention Act (WTPA)

NYC Multiple Dwellings Registration Act to Promote Landlord Accountability

## 2011

NYC Student Safety Act

NYC Intro 656 to Stop Unjust Deportations

NYC Crackdown on Asthma Triggering Housing Conditions

Executive Order 26: Translation & Interpretation at State Agencies

School Facility, Accountability, Capacity and Transparency (FACT) Act

## 2012

President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Suffolk County Executive Order: Translation & Interpretation at County Agencies

Safe Rx: Translation & Interpretation at Major Pharmacies Statewide



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