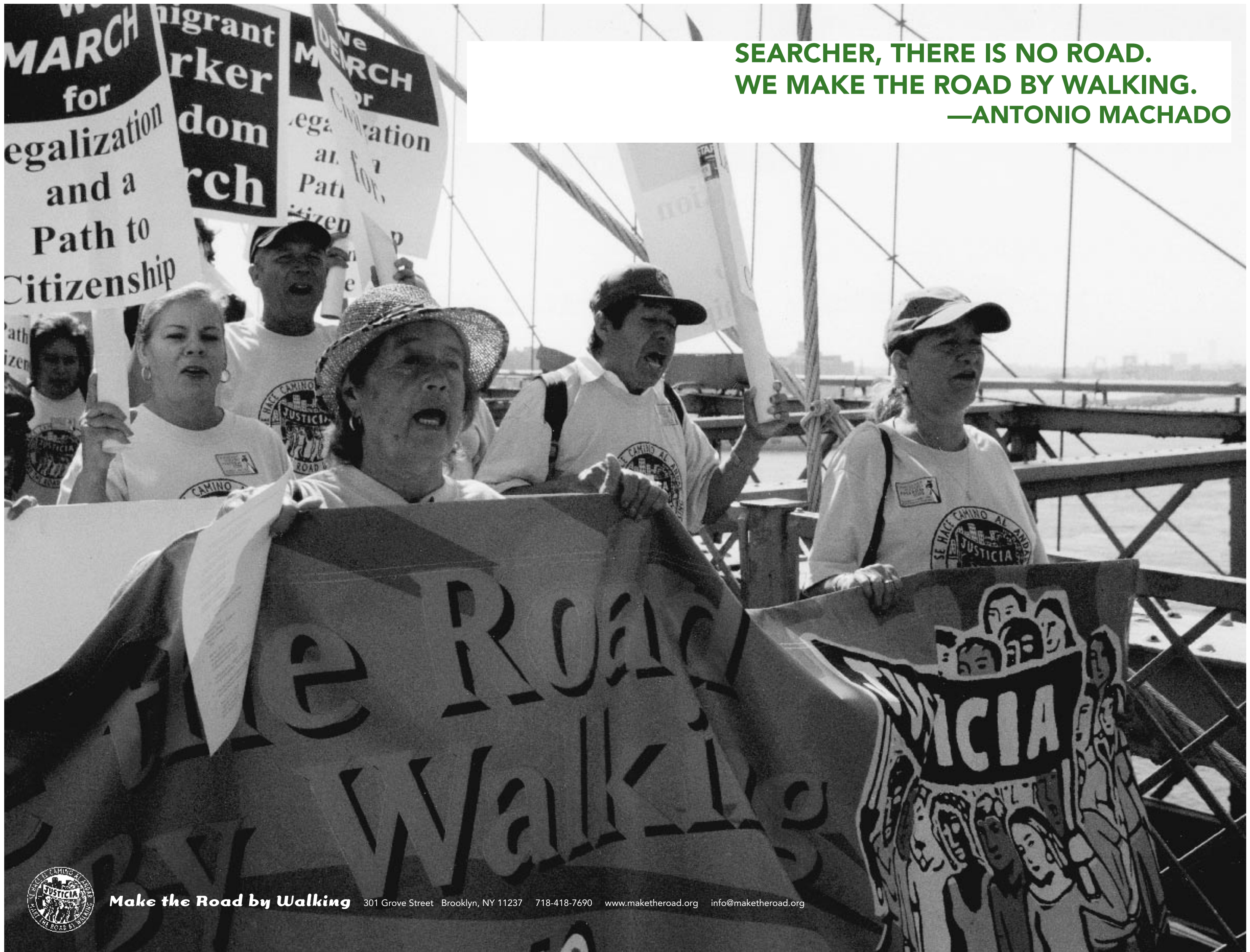


**SEARCHER, THERE IS NO ROAD.
WE MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING.
—ANTONIO MACHADO**





Make the Road by Walking is a membership-led organization based in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Our members are low-income, Latino and African-American immigrants of all ages. Make the Road by Walking confronts the severe economic and political marginalization suffered by low-income and immigrant New Yorkers.



Our multi-faceted approach includes:

ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM to build a stronger community, make governing institutions subject to democratic community control, and mobilize resistance to oppression based on race, class, gender, age, national origin, and sexual orientation. Our work is focused in the following issue areas:

The Economic Justice and Democracy Project combats the political vulnerability of low-income, immigrant New Yorkers through grassroots leadership development, public policy advocacy and community organizing to enforce and expand the civil rights of limited English proficient New Yorkers.

The Education Justice Project organizes and educates parents and caretakers about their children's rights in school, increases parent involvement in educational policy-making, works to improve local school performance and promotes citywide educational equity.

The Environmental and Housing Justice Project builds a strong membership base of environmental and tenant activists, develops grassroots leadership and organizes for safe, affordable housing and a healthy urban environment for low-income communities of color.

Gays and Lesbians of Bushwick Empowered fights institutional homophobia and the harassment, isolation and invisibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Bushwick.

The Workplace Justice Project organizes to promote respect for workers' rights and dignity and to challenge employers who violate health and safety regulations, violate laws regulating minimum wage and overtime pay, or retaliate against workers who organize with their co-workers for improved labor conditions.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING to share ideas and experiences, to analyze the root causes of the problems we face and to strategize about how we can take action together to resolve these problems in a way that values the voice, perspective and contribution of every person. We carry out this work through the following programs:

Our **Adult Education Program** offers English as a Second Language (ESL), Spanish language literacy, and computer literacy classes for our members and other community residents. Our intensive three-hour classes have a low student-to-teacher ratio and integrate issues of social justice into the curriculum.

Our **Youth Power Project** supports Make the Road by Walking members between the ages of 8 and 21 in developing leadership, group work and literacy skills, through implementing social justice campaigns and participating in an array of after-school and summer enrichment activities.

We also provide political education, leadership development and organizing skills training for our adult members through regular **Learning Circles**. These workshops employ popular education techniques to develop leaders and catalyze grassroots civic participation. In particular, our frequently-offered *Encuentros de Líderes* workshop develops residents' organizing, analytical and group work skills, and deepens their understanding of the law, New York City organizing history and the legislative landscape. The workshops enable participants to better understand organizing work and put neighborhood concerns in a broader context in order to identify public policy challenges.

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT to provide badly needed legal and other services to our members, and affirm an ethic of cooperation, mutual help, dignity, and *animosidad*. This work is focused in the following areas:

Defending workers' rights complements the efforts of our Workplace Justice Project. We provide vital individual legal representation to redress the injustices faced by low-income workers. Staff attorneys conduct legal intake and provide legal representation in wage and hour, safety and health and workplace discrimination cases.

Our legal work helps to **protect neighborhood tenants** by directly assisting them in filing housing code violation complaints, challenging illegally high rents, and forcing negligent landlords to place their buildings in the hands of third-party administrators.

Our staff attorneys also provide **legal representation on government benefits issues** that enables hundreds of community families yearly to access hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegally denied benefits such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, Child and Family Health Plus, Social Security Disability, Supplemental Security Income and Public Assistance benefits. This work prevents countless families and individuals from entering into the shelter system.

Our efforts also support parents in **enforcing education law**. Legal advocacy clinics by Make the Road by Walking provide support to parents with questions or concerns regarding school-related legal issues. Parents are able to challenge unlawful student suspensions, file grievances, access their children's school records, and demand interpretation and translation services in critical school meetings.

I can sum up Make the Road by Walking in three words: unity—because we are working together; compassion—because we help anyone that needs it and, honesty—because we are transparent in our actions and every day our work is more visible.

MANUEL RODRIGUEZ, MEMBER

Only when we put our shoulders together can we go farther and achieve a different society—a society of peace and justice.

VICENTE MAYORGA, MEMBER



MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING 2004 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Expanding Civil Rights and Ensuring Equal Access to Health Care for Limited English-Proficient New Yorkers

As a result of our direct action community organizing work, Brooklyn Hospital signed a far-reaching corrective action agreement to post new multilingual signs, translate all written materials, provide staff interpreters and comprehensive training about medical interpreting, with ongoing monitoring of all new services.

In addition, our organizing work, coupled with intensive monitoring and accountability meetings, led both Wyckoff Heights Medical Center and Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center to take additional measures to ensure full compliance of agreements signed with the Attorney General as a result of Make the Road by Walking's previous civil rights complaints. Both hospitals will make changes to improve health care service delivery to patients with limited English. Based on the reforms that Make the Road by Walking catalyzed at Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center, the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation has instituted system-wide reforms for



all New York City public hospitals, changes which will make life easier for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

Make the Road by Walking is leading the charge to ensure equal treatment for limited English-proficient parents of children in New York City's public schools. We are currently working with ally organizations and members of the New York City Council to promote the *Education Equity Act*, legislation that

will end national origin discrimination in schools.

Protecting and Expanding Immigrant Workers' Rights

Our Workers in Action committee coordinated a successful boycott of a Bushwick area retailer, collecting over 800 signatures of community residents. In conjunction with protests and the boycott, our legal action won \$65,000

for eight Mexican immigrant women who had been denied their labor rights for years. These workers were required to work at the store for over fifty hours per week—and in some cases without receiving proper overtime pay or even minimum wage. During holiday months, employees were forced to work overtime daily, seven days a week. Employees who took a day off to care for a severely ill child were summarily fired.

Securing the Environmental Health of Our Community

Our Environmental and Housing Justice Project's grassroots and coalition organizing work led the New York City Council to pass *Local Law 1: The Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Act*, the nation's strongest anti-lead poisoning law. This legislation will prevent thousands of low-income New York children from being poisoned. Grassroots organizations from around the country have contacted us in the hopes of replicating our organizing campaign.

Involving Parents, Students and Community in School Reform

Our Education Justice Project forced the New York City Department of

Education (DOE) to change the leadership of a local failing intermediate school. Parents succeeded in pressuring an unresponsive and ineffective Principal at IS 291—where 90% of the students were not reading or doing math at grade level—to leave. Parents are now working with the DOE to ensure that an excellent new principal is hired to improve the school.

Combating Institutional Homophobia

Make the Road by Walking's GLOBE Project has created a safe space for LGBT members of our community and has launched an ambitious Safe Schools campaign to challenge individual and institutional homophobia at neighborhood schools.

Creating Much-needed, High-quality Learning Opportunities for Adults

Our Adult Education programs now serve more than 300 students over three class cycles per year. The program currently offers eleven classes per week, and has drawn dozens of new community residents to our membership. The program now offers instruction in

English as a Second Language at several levels, as well as several technology and computer skills classes per week. Finally, the program is one of the few sources of Spanish language literacy instruction in the city, enabling immigrant adults who are beginning readers to build reading and writing skills in their own language. The program aims to build the confidence and capacity of individual students, while promoting an awareness of community concerns and

"... I felt most proud when we won the battle to pass The Equal Access to Health and Human Services Bill. At that moment, it didn't matter that I am disabled, I didn't feel the cold or the rain. We were there trying to find a solution to the problems faced by those of us that cannot speak English. Even though we won, the fight has not ended."

BARCILIDES MATOS
ECONOMIC JUSTICE PROJECT

civic involvement. In all classes, students learn critical language and literacy or technology skills while exploring issues such as lack of affordable housing, poor quality health care, and problems in our community's public schools.

Building Community Power through Popular Education

Over the past year, more than 400 community residents have attended bi-weekly workshops or "learning circles" about compelling issues such as "The Labor Movement in Colombia" and "Community Development Work in Cuba," as well as topics with daily relevance to the lives of our members such as "How to Avoid Predatory Lenders" and "Effective Communication with the Media." Additionally, over 150 community residents have graduated from our intensive *Encuentros de Lideres*, trainings which provide participants with opportunities to develop leadership and community organizing skills.

Developing Youth-Led Organizing for High School Reform

Our Youth Power Project members continue a three-year struggle to

promote effective and sustainable high school reform in our community. Our efforts have prompted city officials to begin addressing the shortage of high school seats in the community, dire facility needs, and safety concerns. This work has drawn local, citywide, and national attention to the key role young people should play in high school reform initiatives.

Building Partnerships with Area Schools

Two innovative new high schools in the Bushwick community—the Bushwick School for Social Justice and Bushwick Community High School—have partnered with Make the Road by Walking to support their continued success with students. Our work supports these schools in promoting positive civic engagement and a commitment to community among students and staff. Our Youth Power Project staff designs exciting, hands-on opportunities for students to explore social justice themes and neighborhood action projects.

Providing a Growing Array of After-School and Summer Youth Programming

To complement our youth-led organizing work, Make the Road by Walking has begun to offer four days



per week of after-school programming at our partner high schools and at our location. These activities include basketball, hip hop, dance, poetry and our youth-written newspaper *The Word on the Street*. Additionally, Make the Road by Walking now hosts the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment in offering after-school enrichment opportunities for children eight to 12 years old. Through this program, our youngest members explore issues related to social justice and the urban

environment, develop critical group work, leadership, and literacy skills, and contribute their energy and enthusiasm to our ongoing projects and campaigns.

Providing Tenant Associations with Legal Advice and Representation

This year our Legal Services program began providing legal advice and representation to tenant associations in order to make safe living possible in

buildings where the landlord is negligent or absent altogether. Project attorneys have won major improvements and renovations to neighborhood apartments and buildings.

Assisting New Yorkers in Navigating the City's Health Care and Public Benefits System

Over the past twelve months we have helped over two hundred and fifty individuals through customized advocacy and legal services. Approximately 800 people took advantage of our “Know Your Rights” training workshops that increased resident’s capacity to understand their legal rights.

Advocating for Active Participation in Education

In a neighborhood where community schools consistently perform far below average, we have assisted dozens of parents in navigating the New York City education system, obtaining transfers out of failing classrooms, protecting students’ rights with regard to Special Education tracking, and providing Spanish-speaking parents with *respaldo* (support) as they struggle to participate in their children’s education. We are in the process of litigating a series of complaints regarding the New York City Department of Education’s failure

“I would tell people that haven’t been to Make the Road that they should go because instead of being in the streets and getting into trouble they could be in a place where you are having fun and helping make changes in your community.”

YOBANNY LORA
YOUTH POWER PROJECT



to provide adequate translation services for parents with limited English.

Providing Emergency Food to Area Families

During 2004, Make the Road by Walking’s weekly food pantry provided nearly 200 community residents each month with assistance in meeting basic nutritional needs.

Continuing Legal Advocacy with Grassroots Organizing

Make the Road by Walking took on a major neighborhood retail store, Minimax, with a coordinated strategy of litigation in federal court and a grassroots consumer boycott. For nearly two decades, working conditions at the store were abysmal. As a result of our strategic litigation and organizing in the Minimax case, the employer agreed to pay over \$65,000 in unpaid wages owed to eight former Minimax employees. Beyond compensation of back wages, however, Make the Road by Walking managed to negotiate an innovative settlement that also established an Employee’s Bill of Rights, a Customer’s Bill of Rights, as well as a set of labor standards (including family leave and paid sick days) that may be replicated at other businesses.