

# MAKE THE ROAD CONNECTICUT



## 2020 REPORT



# A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

What a year 2020 has been. We could not have imagined back in January that we would be where we are today. Our members faced crises in housing and food as the government failed to provide needed support to undocumented and immigrant families. Some got sick and worried about how they would afford care without health insurance. Many saw up close for the first time what we have known since we started organizing in 2015, that many of the systems our country has now do not serve the most vulnerable members of our community.

But through it all, our leaders continued to organize and build power as we know that is the only way that we can create the types of systems and structures our community needs. This year our Bridgeport parent leaders launched their One City, Many Languages Campaign, our Fight Back Committee won a Sanctuary City Ordinance in Bridgeport, our Youth Power Committee installed their first permanent streetscape, we raised and distributed over \$50,000 in direct aid to families in need of assistance, became one of the agencies in charge of processing the state rental assistance fund for undocumented families, and joined groups around the state in calling for more state aid for undocumented families and cancellation of rent. We accomplished so much in 2020 and hope that you will read through the following pages to find out more.

As we move into 2021, we continue to face many uncertainties. However, what we do know for certain is the Make the Road CT will be here building leaders, providing legal and survival services to the community, and fighting for local and statewide changes our community needs to not just live but thrive.

We thank you for all your support in 2020 and invite you to continue to engage with us in 2021.

With gratitude,

*Barbara Lopez*





# OUR MISSION & VISION

## OUR MISSION

Make the Road CT (MRCT) is an intergenerational member-led community-based organization working to build power in immigrant, Latinx, 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.

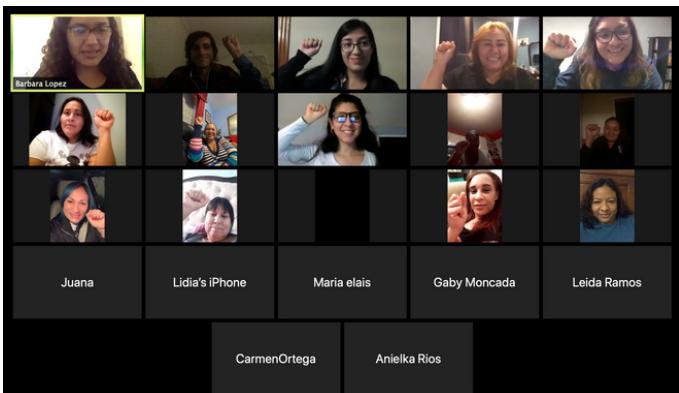
## OUR VISION

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 2020

## Civic & Voter Engagement

Our MTR family was engaged in a massive voter turnout campaign for this past election so our members showed up to support in making phone calls and sending text messages to turn out the vote. We also made space for our members to talk about what the election results meant to them. We heard members share a mix of nerves and excitement and a readiness to hold Biden accountable for supporting Black and Brown communities as he takes office.



## Census Work

We know how important it is to make sure every person is counted for the census and how the Trump Administration tried very hard to dissuade undocumented and Latinx residents from completing it. That is why MTR intentionally engaged in contacting residents of Bridgeport and Hartford, especially those who may have been hesitant to complete the census or had questions about how to fill out the form.

## Immigration Accompaniment Launch

Early in 2020, our Fightback Committee launched our accompaniment program. This program pairs allies with MRCT members when they need to go to immigration court or ICE check-ins. Allies provide support and solidarity and activate rapid response and deportation defense networks if ICE tries to kidnap one of our members. This is extremely important solidarity work only being done at the hyper-local community level.



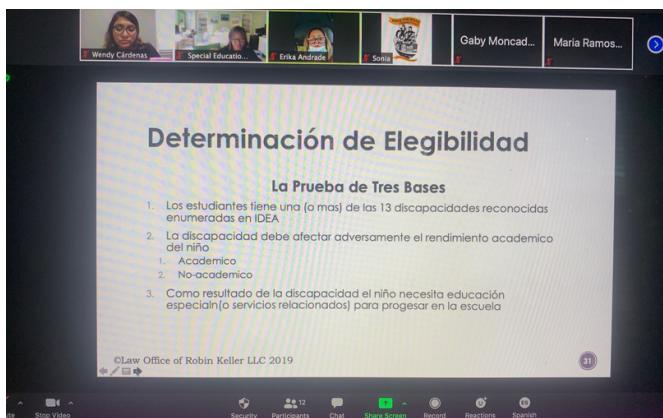
## Permanent Streetscape Installed

Our youth leaders worked with the city of Bridgeport to install the first permanent streetscape on the corner of Laurel and Grove. This is the first of many streetscapes that will be installed to provide safe walking routes for students on their way to school. This is part of the huge victory our young people won last year to get streetscapes, increased transportation access, and youth voice included in the City Master Plan.



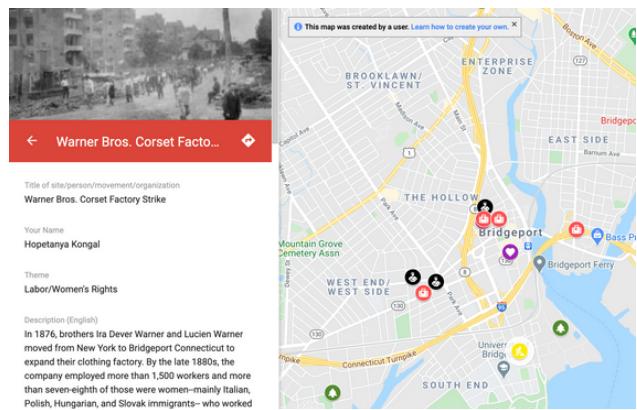
## Special Education Accompaniment

In September, our parent leaders were trained in how to accompany and be an advocate for parents trying to navigate the special education system. Many times it is hard to navigate the education system so those doing accompaniment ensure students' rights are being respected and that the school is providing the supports guaranteed by law for students receiving special education services. This will also allow our parent leaders to connect with other parents in the community and build our base of parent leaders!



## Sites of Resistance Map Creation

For six weeks during the summer, we hosted a youth Summer Academy where our young people worked together to create a map of Bridgeport highlighting spaces related to the struggle for worker, immigrant, and civil rights. Named the Sites of Resistance Project, this map is now publicly accessible so that anyone can explore the information that our young people found and curated.



## Statewide Virtual Member Assembly

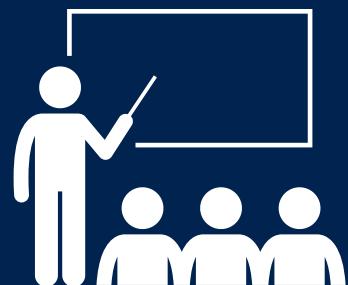
In December, we gathered together with over 50 of our members from Bridgeport and Hartford to close out 2020 and discuss our vision for 2021. Our members spoke about the importance of fighting for equitable access to housing, healthcare, and employment, and their excitement to continue to learn, grow, and step into leadership roles in 2021.



## Rental Assistance Program

Based on feedback from our members around the need for housing assistance, Make the Road worked with the State to become one of the organizations managing applications for the Rental Assistance Program for undocumented residents of Bridgeport and Hartford. So far our staff has processed over 115 applications which includes connecting with families and landlords to ensure applications are completed correctly and that the money gets to the right person. These applications have resulted in over \$250,000 being distributed to support families in paying their rent and ensuring they are not evicted during the pandemic.

# DEVELOPING MEMBERS & LEADERS



**Over 17,500** viewers in 25 Facebook Lives led by organizers and leaders focused on Know Your Rights in housing, COVID, and employment, filling out the census, campaign launches, and much more!

**Over 200** members trained in organizing skills and political education including:

- 50 Members Trained in Phone Banking, Story of Self, Campaign Development, 1:1s, and Public Speaking
- 20 Members Trained in Immigration Court Accompaniment
- 20 Members Trained in Emergency Plan Preparedness
- 20 Members Trained in Housing Know Your Rights
- 20 Members Trained in Police Accountability
- 20 Members Trained in TRUST ACT and Bridgeport Ordinance "Protection for Bridgeport Families & Immigrants"
- 30 Members Trained in Bilingual Education Policies
- 16 Members Trained in Special Education Policies
- 10 Youth Members Participated in Political Education



# ONE CITY MANY LANGUAGES



## CAMPAIGN DEMANDS

- Ensure teachers and administrators understand the laws and documentation regarding services that must be followed in the bilingual education program.
- Ensure neighborhood schools offer bilingual programs in schools where there are more than 20 students who need it.
- Ensure that the planning process, as prescribed by law, is being followed for ELL students and make information publicly available to allow for community accountability.
- Ensure that transportation is offered to all students in bilingual schools (Batalla and Marin), including for students living outside the neighborhood.
- Ensure a portion of COVID money given to the district is allocated specifically to ELL students and programs.
- Create a parent advisory committee to continuously advise bilingual programs in Bridgeport

In 2019 our parent leaders conducted surveys that showed many parents in Bridgeport did not know or understand what ELL and bilingual options are available for their children. In order to change this, in early 2020, our parent leaders worked with the district to host several informational sessions about bilingual education. However, the school district did not hold up its end of the agreement so our parent leaders worked to come up with demands to improve equity in bilingual education in Bridgeport.

The demands listed on the left include ensuring staff is aware of and trained on the laws surrounding bilingual education, ensuring transportation is offered to students, and ensuring parents are continuously able to inform and advise the district on their experiences and improvements that are needed. The goal is that winning this campaign will ensure that all Bridgeport parents understand what their bilingual and ELL options are and bilingual and ELL students receive an equitable education with all the resources they need.

*"I'm very proud to be part of the Mothers in Action committee. I think that if Covid-19 had not happened, our campaign would be very advanced, on the verge of winning it. But 2020 has given us a great lesson. Despite the pandemic we have continued our meetings through zoom because for us mothers fighting for our students in our community is our priority. Winning "One City, Many Languages" is our goal. We will keep fighting until we achieve everything we set out to do in Bridgeport's Mothers in Action committee."*

-Minerva Antigua

# SANCTUARY CITY VICTORY

In 2018 our fightback committee started fighting for Bridgeport to become a sanctuary city. The committee was met with strong resistance from the mayor and other city officials, meaning we needed to organize the city council and other decision-makers to pass an ordinance. During the pandemic, the Bridgeport City Council finally voted to pass the Sanctuary City Ordinance. You can see all the components of the ordinance on the right with the overall theme being the protection of the immigrant community in Bridgeport.

This was a huge victory but we know the fight is not over. Just because a policy passes does not mean it is implemented well. That is why the Fightback Committee has continued to meet and talk with the city and police to ensure that employees are trained and understand how to adhere to the ordinance. The Fightback Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the ordinance as they begin planning their next campaign.

*"I am a proud leader of the Fightback Committee, where we fight and empower our community to improve our quality of life as undocumented, mixed-status, and more vulnerable families. During Covid-19, we launched our campaign Protection for Bridgeport Families and Immigrants. We met with members of the city council virtually, made calls, sent emails, testified, and finally won our campaign in April. We demonstrated the power that the voice and union of the members of the Fightback Committee have. Now our community has protection for all. We continue to fight together and are ready to start our next campaign.*

-Nidia Marin



## COMPONENTS

- Requires all Bridgeport police to fully comply with the TRUST Act which says that Bridgeport Police shall not hold anyone in its custody for immigrant purposes and shall not honor any immigrant detainer that is not accompanied by a judicial warrant or court order signed by a judge
- Requires Bridgeport police to train its members on the TRUST Act
- States that city officials or employees can't request or require the citizenship or immigration status of a person unless it is required by state or federal law
- States that Bridgeport Police must take all reasonable steps to help victims of certain crimes pursue U-Visas
- States that the City of Bridgeport is required to make reasonable efforts to provide city services and documents in the languages spoken by at least 5% of the population.

# TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE



## CAMPAIGN DEMANDS

- Creation of a Youth Advisory Committee to the Board of Education to advise on transportation and education issues
- Put policies in place to ensure more students qualify for school transportation or stipends for public transportation
- Ensure credit recovery classes meet student needs and stop punishments for being late
- Creation of a youth advisory committee to address education inequities in accessing higher education and career preparation



In 2019, our Youth Power Committee had a huge victory when recommendations they made to the city about safe walking routes for students to school were included in the City of Bridgeport Master Plan. This included streetscapes to slow traffic and create safer crossings at intersections and the designation of routes specifically for walking to school with sidewalk and infrastructure improvements on those routes. In order to achieve this victory, our youth attended City Council hearings, met with city officials, including the Mayor, held demonstrations, and rallied with their fellow students.

The pandemic delayed the start of the streetscape and infrastructure work but the first permanent streetscape was finally installed in September of 2020 on the corner of Grove and Laurel Streets. This is the first of several streetscapes and infrastructure improvements that will happen over the next few years. This campaign relates to much larger transportation and education justice issues. Connecticut is known for being a very car dependant state but many Bridgeport residents rely on public transportation and walking, meaning it is important for safe walking routes and reliable transportation to be key issues for all stakeholders. Also, reliable and safe transportation means students get to school on time and ready to learn. Our youth leaders will continue to work on this and other transportation and education justice issues as we move into 2021.

*"There was a moment in the campaign that was really powerful for me and that was when one of my peers had to go up to speak to the council and was told to sit down because her story was repetitive. But with all of us behind her, she stood up proud and still spoke her piece. At that moment, the youth committee showed its power."*

-Crystal Aguirre

# COVID 19 RESPONSE

COVID 19 has had a drastic impact on our community. Many of our members had to work throughout the pandemic as many worked in frontline industries and could not afford to take time off. Some got sick and were afraid of going to the doctor or hospital because of their status. Many did not receive any support from the government, neither stimulus checks nor unemployment benefits because of their status.

For this reason, after the stimulus checks were announced, MRCT began a fundraising campaign to raise over \$30,000 to support 60 families with checks of \$500 each. Thanks to the outpouring of support we raised over \$50,000 that was distributed to **over 100 families in Bridgeport and Hartford**. Many of these families were not receiving support from anyone else.

We also are a part of the distribution of funds from the Rental Assistance that the CT Department of Housing created for undocumented families after pushing from community groups. We have been able to submit over 115 rental assistance applications totaling **over \$250,000 in rental assistance** with more to come in 2021.

We also know that the money that has been made available is not enough which is why Make the Road has joined with allied groups around the state to **call on the state of Connecticut to create a \$150 million relief fund for undocumented residents** and to **cancel rent for the rest of the time that Connecticut is under an emergency order**. Without these supports, many families will face eviction and other hardships.

## Make The Road CT

Immigrant Community Relief Fund

**OUR GOAL: \$30,000 for 60 families**

**#ShareYourCheck**

**We will meet our goal if:**

- If 250 individuals donate 10% of their check,
- If 100 people donate 1/4 of their check,
- If 50 people donate half their check.

**[bit.ly/MRCTcovid](http://bit.ly/MRCTcovid)**

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

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: Make The Road CT

**\$50,000**

Raised to Give Aid to Families in Bridgeport & Hartford

**100**

Families Supported with Direct Cash Assistance

**115+**

Rental Assistance Applications Processed

I Joined Make The Road CT 3 years ago because I was new to Bridgeport and I didn't know how to navigate the education system. I was looking for a better education for my 3 kids. Then I became a leader of the Fightback Committee because I personally had an issue with immigration. It was an injustice and an example of what other families are going through when they are looking for a better life.

As the Fightback Organizer, I love my job not because it is a responsibility or duty, but I love what I do because I bring personal experience of what the community goes through when we live in a system that targets Latinx, brown, and low-income families. We are a group of multi-cultural people that fights against injustice and for equity in healthcare and education for our community.

As an organizer, I am close to members of the community. I create a friendship with members so that together we create trust and respect for everyone even if they have different beliefs or opinions. I know how important it is that the community has a space at Make the Road CT where they can learn, develop skills to share, where they own their story, and empower themselves to fight for more resources to support our community.

We need to work together and raise our voice to achieve a change to get more economic relief, healthcare coverage for all, and to cancel rent because our community needs it during these 11 months of covid-19 and beyond. Most of our community is being impacted by the pandemic, lost their job, got sick, or lost a loved one and that is why we need more resources now.

-Sonia Hernandez, Fightback Organizer



# MEET OUR GROWING STAFF TEAM

2020 was a year of growth for us here at Make the Road CT in terms of building the staff team we need to organize for change, develop leaders, and take our work to the next level. Throughout the year, we have been able to hire 3 new staff people, move one of our staff from being part-time to full-time, and give one of our staff a well-deserved promotion! All of these staff changes are helping to create the long-term sustainability that we need to successfully organize in Hartford and Bridgeport, build parent and youth leaders, and win tangible victories for our Latinx, immigrant, and low-income communities.



Left from Top:  
Wendy Cardenas,  
M.E. Smith, Barbara  
Lopez, Elizabeth  
Mitchell-Gonzalez,

Right from Top:  
Doris Cordova,  
Sonia Hernandez,  
Stefan Keller

**Wendy Cardenas, Lead Organizer** - In her new role as Lead Organizer, Wendy will lead the training, development, and strategy of our new organizing team while continuing to organize the Madres en Acción committee.

**Doris Cordova, Youth Organizer** - Doris has the role of supporting and building the leadership of youth leaders within the Youth Power Committee as they continue their campaign "Walking Towards a Brighter Future."

**Sonia Hernandez, Fight Back Organizer** - Sonia has the role of holding Bridgeport leaders accountable for strong implementation of the Sanctuary City Ordinance, TRUST Act, and supporting members with accompaniment and fighting deportation cases.

**Stefan Keller, Development Associate** - Stefan has the role of supporting MRCT's sustainability and growth through grant-writing, fundraising, and communications support.

**Barbara Lopez, Director** - Barbara advances MRCT vision and mission by building a strong organizational infrastructure, leading campaigns and programs, developing leaders and staff, fundraising, representing the organization publicly, and working together with other Make the Roads to construct a powerful family of organizations that can lead the progressive movement.

**Elizabeth Mitchell-Gonzalez, Community Organizer** - Elizabeth has the role of strengthening parent organizing in Hartford and supporting community members in applying for rental assistance through the CT rental assistance fund.

**Mary Elizabeth (M.E.) Smith, Development & Programs Organizer** M.E. has the task of identifying funding and cultivating donor relationships to sustain our organization. M.E. also leads on developing innovative programs that meet our members' needs.

# A LOOK AHEAD AT 2021

## BUILDING LEADERSHIP

**450+**

New Community Member  
Connections to Build Organizing  
Lists

**100+**

New Monthly Dues Paying Members

**80+**

Statewide Leaders from Across our  
Different Committees and Cities  
(Bridgeport & Hartford)

**8**

Permanent Members of our  
Statewide Leadership Committee  
that Meets Monthly

### 2021 Organizing Priorities

**Economic Justice:** Our members need better paying, more stable jobs, and relief from the government to get through the pandemic. To achieve this, we will continue to advocate for a \$150 million relief fund to support our immigrant communities, statewide workers' rights legislation, and cancellation of rent while also conducting know your rights sessions to ensure our community is not taken advantage of.

**Healthcare:** COVID-19 is significantly affecting our families' health. This is combined with problems that already existed such as lack of availability of preventative care and lack of health insurance for undocumented families. That is why we are continuing to fight in 2021 for Husky for All and the Eligibility Expansion of Husky A, B, and D to greatly improve the situation of many of our immigrant and working-class families in facing this health crisis.

**Equitable Education:** Our members continue to lead long-term advocacy to improve bilingual education in Bridgeport and Hartford Public Schools as well as short-term pandemic response to improve the immediate distance learning of their children. We also advocate to ensure children receiving special education services have their needs met.

**Freedom to Thrive:** Black, Latinx, Immigrant, and Indigenous people have less wealth and power than their white counterparts and frequently their needs are ignored. We will continue to work on preventing deportations, pushing for funds to be diverted from police forces to other community needs, and other initiatives that allow all community members to live with dignity and respect and be free from fear.



## 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