

Make the Road by Walking: Community Leadership development

Through an innovative combination of education, campaigning, strategic public policy advocacy, and high quality legal and support services community group **Make the Road by Walking** is improving the lives of thousands of New York City families.

The organisation draws its evocative name from a line by Spanish Poet Antonio Machado: *Caminante, no hay camino. Se hace el camino al andar: Searcher, there is no road. We make the road by walking.*

A thread running through all the work of this multi-purpose agency is that local people should be the inspiration behind the city-wide public policy decisions which affect their children, their families and their communities.

Make the Road New York is a membership organisation which combines participatory decision making, deep community roots, and democratic accountability with a solid track record of success in expanding Civil Rights and electoral engagement; improving housing, health and the local environment as well as supporting local people in their workplaces and into education.

Leadership Development

Make the Road believe that, traditionally, low-income people are spoken for by clergy, elected officials, and others who claim to represent the communities: people who rarely, if ever, consult those they seek to represent. Therefore Leadership Development has become a central element of the work enabling hundreds of graduates of the training programmes to speak for themselves and others through community organising and advocacy campaigns. Former participants have become uncharacteristically politically powerful among low-income New Yorkers. They are the people that get called by the press and invited to speak at public hearings about the policies that shape lives and

communities in the City. For example, public hearings of the New York City Council and local Community Board meetings.

Weekly meetings provide opportunities for members to develop organising, analytical and group work skills, and also deepen their understanding of city and state policies. Additionally around 60 member leaders from across the organisations areas meet quarterly for additional leadership development and to discuss the strategic direction of the organization.

Youth Leadership Development

Each year, Make the Road youth staff identify a group of members to be core youth leaders. This small group receives one-to-one mentoring from a member of staff as they progress through a leadership development structure, which recognizes young people's commitment to their work, their own personal development, and their development as effective community leaders.

As young people progress they become eligible to receive short-term paid positions, as well as internships at other social justice organisations.

Know your Rights

Alongside the practical support around health housing and education the Make the Road legal department provides regular "Know Your Rights" training on subjects ranging from the tenants' Bill of Rights to disability benefit eligibility and what to do if stopped by the police, with the goal of increasing members' ability to enforce their own rights while developing their practical knowledge of the laws that affect them most.

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