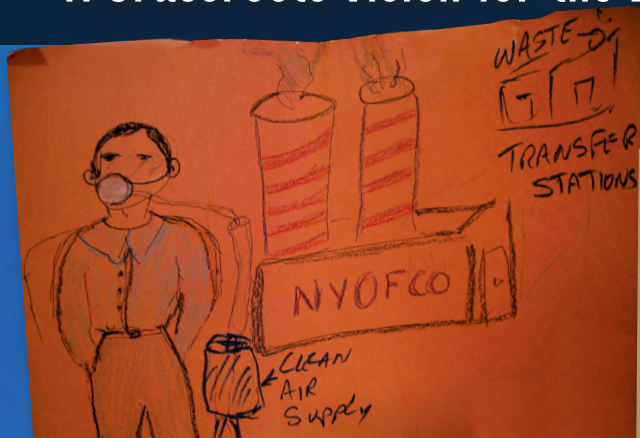
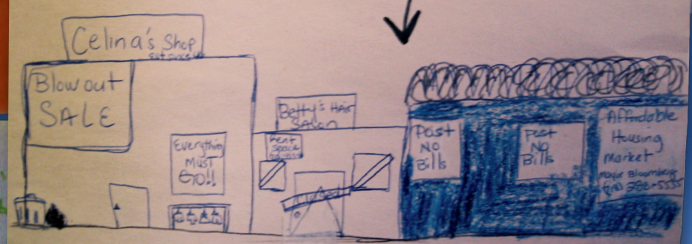


CHANGE STARTS WITH US:

A Grassroots Vision for the Development of the South Bronx



What Gentrification Looks Like



Is high school any Different from Jail?



Healthcare System Now

People have a right 2 free & Accessible healthcare.



URBAN JUSTICE



2010

MOTHERS ON THE MOVE COMMUNITY VISIONING

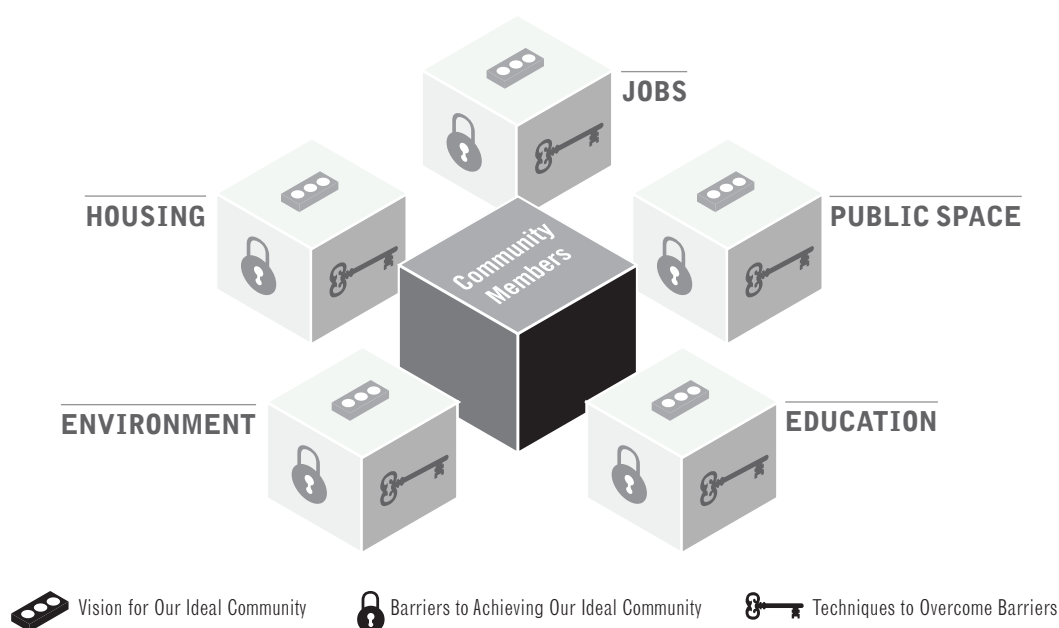
Informed democracy means that people are not only informed and involved, but central to the decision making process. We are tired of being misinformed and spoon-fed on the sidelines. Change has to start with us.¹

Background

In 2009, Mothers on the Move (MOM), a grassroots membership-led organization based in the South Bronx, developed and implemented a three-part Community Visioning Process. MOM's goal for the visioning process was to develop an alternative to gentrification by having community members imagine their ideal community and identify concrete steps to build that community in the South Bronx.

The year long, three-part visioning process aimed to inspire the community to think big about the future development of the South Bronx. Each step of the process, including goals, curricula and facilitation agenda, were developed by a team of MOM leaders with support from staff. During the first part of the visioning process, MOM collectively analyzed the issues facing residents using the Right to the City Alliance's 101 workshop that was tailored to the South Bronx. In particular, MOM focused on how gentrification and the forces behind gentrification are affecting the development of the neighborhood and the impact this has on residents.

Based on this workshop and analysis of gentrification, MOM planned a community visioning session to develop an alternative community-based vision for the South Bronx. Held on April 18th 2009 at the Iglesia Evangelical Española Del Bronx and attended by almost 100 community members, the extensive visioning session lasted all day.



In the morning, community members were divided into 5 groups and each group discussed a different topic (housing, environmental justice, education, jobs, and public space). While teams of MOM leaders and staff helped move the discussion along, the vision came from the community members who developed 'bricks' or concrete goals for the future to represent the building blocks of our vision. Groups then discussed the 'locks' or the barriers to accomplishing the goals and identified the 'keys' to overcoming these barriers. After each group discussed the overall vision for individual topics, participants came back together and voted on the top priorities for the South Bronx which then became the fundamental elements of MOM's broad, alternative vision.

¹ All quotes from the second stage of MOM's community visioning process.

During the last part of the process, community members presented the vision to the public and elected officials at MOM's annual People's Assembly. Held on May 21st 2009, the event was attended by several elected officials including City Comptroller Bill Thompson and Councilmember Maria Del Carmen Arroyo. MOM members presented their testimonials and solutions, outlining their vision for the South Bronx. MOM called on elected officials to implement the community's vision and made several specific policy demands.

Our Neighborhood

The South Bronx community is home to almost half a million people (444,631 residents).¹ The community is one of the poorest in the city with the two neighborhoods with the lowest median income and the highest poverty rates. In both Mott Haven/Hunt's Point and Morrisania/Belmont the poverty rate is above 40% and the median income is less than \$21,000.² Most residents in the South Bronx are Hispanic (62.7%), but there is also a large African American population (33%).³

This document, which was compiled with the support of the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project, documents the vision of South Bronx residents and MOM members, dividing the vision into five sections: Housing, Environmental Justice, Education, Jobs, and Public Space. Each of the sections lays out the following:



FOUNDATION – A summary of the historical context of the issue and MOM's related work



PILLARS – Principles central to MOM's vision for the future, created during the CV process



BRICKS – Concrete goals and next steps for MOM

HOUSING OUR COMMUNITY: MORE THAN JUST SHELTER

The residents would make decisions, focusing on past experiences living in the community. By knowing what didn't work then, [they] will know firsthand what will create an effective living space for residents now.



FOUNDATION

Background

Across the South Bronx, and the City at large, the ongoing affordable housing crisis is affecting thousands of low-income families who are forced to live in substandard housing simply because it is all they can afford. In fact with 93.7% rental occupied housing, Bronx Community District 1 is among the neighborhoods with the highest percent of rental units in the whole City.⁴ The shortage of affordable housing in the private market is supposed to be supplemented with public subsidized housing programs. Indeed in the Mott Haven/Hunt's Point neighborhood 51.6% of rental units are subsidized, the second highest concentration of subsidized units in the city.⁵ However the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is experiencing a \$137 million deficit and has not been able to maintain its current housing stock properly, let alone meet the growing need for affordable housing. Without affordable housing, residents are putting large percentages of their incomes towards housing. In fact the top five neighborhoods in the city with the highest median percentage of income spent on housing are all in the Bronx (University/Fordham is number one with the average renter spending 37.3% of their income on housing).⁶ These problems have culminated into an affordable housing crisis in the South Bronx.



Related Work

MOM has an extensive history of fighting and winning campaigns for tenants' rights, both in project-based Section 8 as well as NYCHA public housing developments. MOM's most recent campaign focused on winning better management for residents in three South Bronx public housing developments (St. Mary's, E.R. Moore, and Bronxchester Houses). At first the goal was to simply get the manager to meet with MOM Housing Justice Committee members to discuss solutions to the ongoing problems with trash pickup and elevator maintenance. Once it became clear that the manager had no intention of meeting with residents, however, the campaign

quickly shifted focus toward the demand for a new manager. In January 2009, MOM won this campaign when the manager was successfully removed after eight months of sustained pressure through media attention, direct action and leveraging relationships with local elected officials. Recently, MOM has been working to build a new base of leadership amongst residents of Forest Houses, who are also extremely concerned with security and maintenance issues, and accountability from NYCHA officials who excluded Forest Houses from receiving any portion of the federal stimulus funds allotted to NYCHA last year.

PILLARS

Quality Living Conditions – All housing should be safe housing, free of environmental dangers that threaten the health of residents.

Affordable – Housing should be attainable and available to all citizens regardless of income.

Community – Residents deserve to live in a neighborhood that promotes personal and professional development.

Resident Decision Making Power – Community related decisions should be made by the residents of the community, based on their first hand knowledge of the community.

BRICKS

Weatherization and “Greening” of existing public housing stock to improve energy efficiency, expand public green space and create much-needed jobs for NYCHA residents.

- ✓ Fighting for the proper maintenance of public housing units, including but not limited to the proper removal of trash, basic repairs to individual apartments, overall upkeep of building and the repair and maintenance of elevators.
- ✓ Advocating for the full funding of NYCHA operating and capital funds by city, state and federal authorities.
- ✓ Working with the city, state, and federal governments and various community groups and members to redefine “affordable housing” as 20% of total household income if yearly income is \$18,000 to \$26,000 and 30% of total income if a household makes more than \$26,000.
- ✓ Developing tenant associations and encouraging the increased communication between tenants and landlords, specifically with tenant and landlord meetings at least once every two months.
- ✓ Working to get the city to require all of the funding and managing agencies for a property to report inspection results every six months to the property’s residents.
- ✓ Advocating for the passage of Housing, Not Warehousing legislation.
- ✓ Working to improve and increase community spaces and residential services including additional after-school programs for kids, a youth center, and educational and developmental classes for adults.
- ✓ Advocating for the construction of more public housing units and the filling of current vacant NYCHA units.
- ✓ Working with NYCHA and NYPD to improve security in public housing developments, including encouraging and facilitating the improvement of police-resident relations.
- ✓ Fighting for increased public housing resident decision making power, particularly in the budget process.

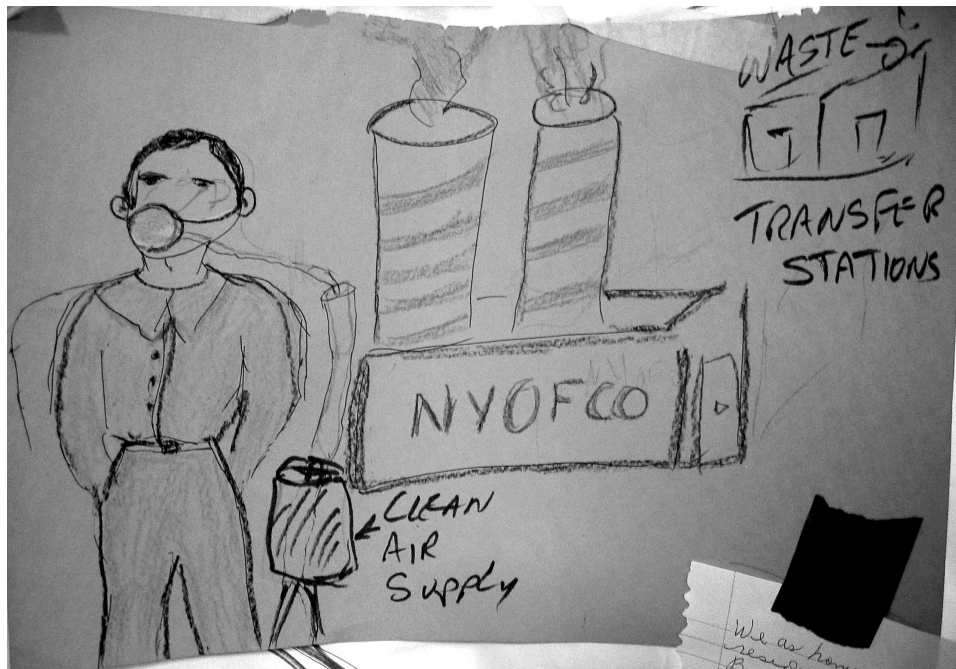
GREENING OUR COMMUNITY: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Community members should join the committee responsible for public health within the community.



Background

Throughout the five boroughs, local City policies disproportionately expose low-income residents to hazardous waste. The South Bronx alone is home to more than two dozen waste transfer stations that process the city's sewage, including the massive New York Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCO), a plant that has long jeopardized the health and well being of community residents by emitting noxious fumes into the air. Current city agencies and policies are insufficient to regulate the toxic emissions from these plants. The South Bronx has the highest rates of asthma in the City, with the neighborhoods of Morrisania/Belmont, Mott Haven/Hunt's Point, and University/Fordham ranking one, two and three respectively.⁷ In fact asthma related death rates in the Bronx are three times higher than the national average.⁸ While Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC makes some improvements toward minimizing the City's waste, it does not address this environmental injustice or provide ways to protect the public health of the South Bronx.



Related Work

MOM's environmental justice efforts have been ongoing since the 1990s. After a girl was hit and killed by a truck headed to Hunt's Point Food Market (one of over 60,000 trucks headed there each week), MOM campaigned for and won a truck rerouting, prohibiting them from traveling through residential areas. As a member of the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance, MOM has been involved in several environmental justice campaigns. In the 1990s, MOM also fought against the building of a medical incinerator and then for its closure. MOM's recent Clean Air Campaign has targeted the New York Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCO) in Hunt's Point that

created a particularly bad smell in the area and negatively impacted residents' health. In the summer of 2007, MOM launched the campaign with a toxic bus tour to show residents, media and elected officials the source of the smell, and raise awareness about the Department of Environmental Protection's lax standards when it comes to the health of the South Bronx. Since then, MOM has held many rallies and protests, including a mock funeral, and engaged in talks with City Council members, assembly members and the Bronx president. In June 2008, after many protests and negotiations with elected officials, MOM decided to pursue legal action with the help of the National Resources Defense Council naming NYC Department of Environmental Protection, NYOFCO, Synagro Technologies, and the Carlyle Group responsible for the continued contamination of the South Bronx.

PILLARS

Public Health – The health of the neighborhood residents should be the number one priority of residents, businesses, elected officials and all people whose actions affect the community.

Green Living – The commitment of residents, businesses and all community members to living a green lifestyle, to reduce the use of fossil fuels and minimize their impact on the environment, is essential to creating a sustainable community in the South Bronx.

Community Decision Making Power – Community members deserve input on decisions that affect the neighborhood's health, development and local environment.

BRICKS

Working to increase the access, production and distribution of fresh, healthy and affordable food through the development of new grocery stores, farmer's markets, urban gardens etc.

- ✓ Promoting the development of green industries in the South Bronx and the creation of green jobs related to recycling, energy efficiency, landfill clean-up and air quality.
- ✓ Working to improve waste management and disposition, specifically with more garbage receptacles.
- ✓ Advocating for local resident representation on the public health committee.
- ✓ Encouraging individuals to conserve through energy efficient practices and working to increase energy efficiency in public and private buildings and spaces.

EDUCATING OUR COMMUNITY: THE NEXT GENERATION

I see in the schools the future of students, their careers. I see in the schools the future of the entire generation.



Background

In 2002, Mayor Bloomberg centralized control of all NYC schools, an act that severely limited the communities input and involvement in schools and outraged many students and parents. This centralization of power created schools and curriculums that do not reflect the cultural diversity of individual neighborhoods or prepare students for higher education with a rigorous curriculum. In fact, the South Bronx has the neighborhoods with the four lowest percentages of students able to perform math at grade-level in the entire city. Mott Haven/Melrose has the lowest percentage of students performing on grade-level for math (44.1%) and for reading (29.8%).⁹ NYPD-trained School Safety Agents (SSAs) who patrol school corridors often exacerbate these problems by creating a threatening atmosphere in which students do not feel safe. Furthermore there is not a formal complaint process and these officers are not subject to principals or other educational authorities.



Related Work

While MOM has always worked on education justice organizing, in the past several years MOM has focused its efforts on building student leadership through Youth on the Move (YOM). Formed in 2004, YOM has an active membership focused on addressing safety issues in South Bronx schools. Locally, YOM has campaigned for and won two Student Success Centers in the Bronx, and facilitated the creation of several social justice clubs in local high schools. As a core organization of the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), YOM has also worked on several city-wide campaigns to fight mayoral control of schools and pass the Student Safety Act. This important legislation will increase accountability over Student Safety Agents and create a mechanism for students to report abuse. Safety in school is a key part of UYC's Student's Bill of Rights, which YOM was instrumental in developing.



PILLARS

Diversity – Schools should reflect the diversity of the students in our neighborhoods.

Safety – Schools should be places where students feel physically and emotionally safe and secure.

Curriculum – All students should have access to a culturally-relevant and academically challenging curriculum.

Cooperation – Schools, students and parents should collaborate to create better schools, curriculums and overall learning environment.



BRICKS

Encouraging the development of a rigorous curriculum that will adequately prepare students for higher education and the workforce.

- ✓ Encouraging the development of a culturally relevant curriculum at all levels of public education.
- ✓ Improving the neighboring community's involvement and participation in school decisions and activities.
- ✓ Increasing parent-teacher communication and ensuring relevant information on a child's education is given to that child's parents. Parents should be the driving force behind school activities and should help build the school community.
- ✓ Advocating for increased parent and student voice at decision-making table in schools and decreased mayoral control of schools.
- ✓ Working to get more public funding for schools.

EMPLOYING OUR COMMUNITY: SUSTAINABLE JOBS

Identify leaders in the community, build and develop leadership of others in community.



Background

The recent economic downturn has severely impacted the Bronx as a whole, where unemployment was at 13.4% in October 2009, higher than anywhere else in the city.¹⁰ For South Bronx residents, however, this is nothing new: many neighborhoods have experienced unemployment rates of 20% and higher for decades.¹¹ City officials have done little to counteract the rising unemployment rate in the South Bronx or provide services to those temporarily unemployed. Despite having the highest unemployment and poverty in New York State,¹² Bronx County was ranked 13th in receipt of stimulus money, receiving only \$135.33 million in federal stimulus funds.¹³ Low-income residents need a voice in the allocation of these funds to ensure it is used efficiently and effectively to create jobs for low-income people.



Related Work

Job creation and development is an essential component to breaking the cycle of poverty, discrimination and distress, and fighting for economic justice in our communities. As the economic recession deepened during 2008 and 2009, MOM's Community Visioning process highlighted the need to develop strategies to address both the economic and ecological crises. In response, MOM began a research project to determine residents' interest in green job development in the South Bronx. The survey also investigates the health of South Bronx residents as a part of MOM's environmental justice work. The results of the survey will be published in the spring of 2010 and will help MOM launch a green jobs campaign.

PILLARS

Green Jobs – The promotion of green industries and jobs to revitalize working class and low income communities is essential to the future development and sustainability of the South Bronx.

Advancement – Every worker has the right to a job with the opportunity to advance, and the right to opportunities to increase his or her skills and abilities to make career advancement possible.

Living Wage and Good Benefits – All people should be paid the value of their labor - living wages with good benefits. Wages must support the cost of all life needs, including adequate food, water, clothing, housing, medical care, education and leisure.

Community Decision Making Power – When new construction affects the neighborhood, especially when it will create jobs, residents deserve input into approving the development and having the first opportunity to work those jobs.

BRICKS

Encouraging the development of high technology jobs in green industries, including jobs that minimize landfill use, increase recycling, develop alternative energy, produce healthy and organic food, increase air quality, prevent asthma and promote energy efficiency.

- ✓ Advocating for the development of courses and classes to encourage professional advancement (specifically technology classes).
- ✓ Working to make community boards more diverse (made up of young people, senior citizens, community members, business owners, scientists, etc) and allow them to decide what kinds of jobs should exist in our community.
- ✓ Advocating for a living wage requirement and sufficient employee benefits.

ACCESSING OUR COMMUNITY: PUBLIC SPACE

Everyone should be able to use public space. People can use it to spend time with friends and family, listen to music, play games and have fun.



Background

Access to public space is a key component to living a healthy urban lifestyle. However, there is only limited public, open space in the South Bronx, a trend found throughout low-income communities in the city. City-wide there is an average of 3.82 acres of city parkland per 1,000 residents.¹⁴ But in Hunt's Point, there is only 0.55 acres of city parkland per 1,000 residents.¹⁵ Furthermore, these 'public spaces' are increasingly being operated and maintained by private entities who are less concerned about the public's access to open space. The low-income residents of the South Bronx deserve better access to public space.



Related Work

During MOM's 17-year history in the South Bronx there have been various efforts to advocate for more safe and public space, including a campaign to re-route truck traffic out of residential neighborhoods and to de-commission the Sheridan Expressway and turn it into green space. MOM defines public space to be all publicly funded areas, including parks, libraries, public housing, subways, waterfronts, etc. Providing needed services to residents, these areas are essential for personal and community development. As a member of the Right To The City Alliance (RTTC-NYC), MOM released a policy platform detailing their goals for public space, including several recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.

PILLARS

Accessibility – Public space should be easily accessible and within close proximity to **ALL** residents.

Community Decision-Making Power – The community residents should decide where public space should be built and how the space is utilized.

BRICKS

Increasing the public space to resident ratio by advocating for the development of green, open, public space.

- ✓ Advocating for increased funding for public spaces and working to make all public spaces open 24 hours a day.
- ✓ Encouraging the development of new community-led park boards called 'Councils for Open Space' made up of representatives from the community, parks department, community board, etc. Monthly meetings would allow for community involvement in decision making.
- ✓ Eliminating 'Quality of Life' policing practices that disproportionately target low income communities of color.
- ✓ Advocating for the development of a waterfront park where residents can boat, fish, have a barbeque, play on a playground, have a community garden, play music and participate in other recreational activities.
- ✓ Working to build a Community Center with public meeting space, a library, a recreation center, adult learning spaces, children's activities, etc.

CALL TO ACTION

MOM's Community Visioning Process is neither a beginning nor an end. It is a valuable step in the journey to create a community where South Bronx residents have the power to exercise democratic control over important decisions and resources. It can be difficult to dream of a better world for future generations, because the conditions today make everyday survival such a struggle for many people. But without a concrete vision of what we would like to be different, we ensure that the current policies of inequality, racism, worker exploitation and ecological devastation will only continue.

And without grassroots community leadership, this dialogue is meaningless. This Community Vision lives and breathes through the actions of MOM members and local residents, who talk to their neighbors, develop strategies and campaigns to engage decision makers on how to get from where we are to where we would like to be. Mothers on the Move was formed in 1992 by a group of South Bronx women to do just that – mobilize strategic leadership of local residents to transform society and themselves.

We know that this dialogue never ends, and the obstacles are real. But working together, community members, allies, elected officials and other decision makers have the imagination and resources to realize this vision.

All it takes is your commitment! We hope you will join us and add your voice.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ 'South Bronx' includes Bronx Community Districts 101, 102, 103, and 104. *The Furman Center's State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods 2008*. Pages 68-73.
- ² *The Furman Center's State of New York City Housing and Neighborhoods 2008*, 70.
- ³ New York City, Community District Profiles for CD 101, 102, 103, and 104. Found at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/lucds/cdstart.shtml>
- ⁴ NYC Department of City Planning, District Profiles, Bronx Community District 1. Found online at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx1profile.pdf>
- ⁵ *The Furman Center's State of New York City Housing and Neighborhoods 2008*, pgs 68-69.
- ⁶ *The Furman Center's State of New York City Housing and Neighborhoods 2008*, pg 72.
- ⁷ *The Furman Center's State of New York City Housing and Neighborhoods 2008*, pg 34.
- ⁸ *Asthma and Air Pollution in the South Bronx*. Found at: http://www.icisnyu.org/south_bronx/AsthmaandAir-Pollution.html
- ⁹ *The Furman Center's State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods 2008*, pg 68.
- ¹⁰ New York State Department of Labor Statistics found at: <http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workforceindustry-data/Pressreleases/prtbur.txt>
- ¹¹ Sustainable South Bronx. <http://www.ssbx.org/index.php?link=38>
- ¹² Bernstein, Andrea. *Bronx Tops in Poverty and Unemployment, 14th in Stimulus*. August 10th, 2009. Article online at: <http://www.wnyc.org/news/articles/138406>
- ¹³ Information regarding stimulus funds can be found at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/nycstim/html/summary/summary.shtml>
- ¹⁴ Ulam, Alex. *Planting An Idea. City Limits Weekly*, April 2001. Found at: http://www.citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article_id=2170
- ¹⁵ Ulam, Alex. *Planting An Idea. City Limits Weekly*, April 2001. Found at: http://www.citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article_id=2170

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mothers on the Move / Madres en Movimiento (MOM) is a member-led social justice organization, founded by a group of South Bronx mothers in 1992 to address the disproportionately poor educational resources available to local children. MOM organizes working class and low-income people of color to take strategic leadership in campaigns to transform both our communities and ourselves, to build and share power in society. MOM members engage in campaign work through three committees: Environmental Justice, Housing Justice and Youth on the Move (Education Justice).

The Community Development Project (CDP) of the Urban Justice Center (UJC) provides legal, technical, research and policy assistance to grassroots community-groups working for positive social change in low-income communities. CDP strives to support such groups in improvement efforts in the following areas: grassroots community organizing; affordable-housing and tenant organizing; sustainable economic development; technical assistance to not-for-profits; worker rights; environmental justice; and immigrant rights and organizing.

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