The Brazilian Immigrant Center of Connecticut
A Quarterly Newsletter

Get Involved
Support the Cause.
Help by donating to support Domestic Workers. Checks can be made out to Brazilian Immigrant Center, 1067 Park Ave, Bridgeport, CT 06604.

Become a Circle of Caring Partner.

Spread the Word.
Reach out to those you know and let them know their rights and that they have support. They are NOT alone.

Save the Date!

Latina Workers Meeting
Date: March 21st, 2014

Haitian Workers Meeting
Date: March 22nd, 2014

West Indian Workers Meeting
Date: March 14th, 2014

A Year of Progress

The Connecticut Office of the Brazilian Immigrant Center has had a busy first year! We started out on a very part time basis in November 2012, there has been much learning about collaborations with other nonprofits and community groups, fundraising, and volunteer engagement. It has been both strenuous and rewarding. Our domestic worker program is unique and the only one of its kind in the state. We exist with fewer resources that our counterpart program in Massachusetts, which has a dedicated domestic worker attorney on staff. In spite of this, our program has grown quickly and is meeting an unserved need for low to moderate income domestic workers in Fairfield County.

We first gathered Latina Domestic Workers (DW) in March of 2013. We convened Brazilian domestic workers in May of 2013. In October 2013 we kicked off parties for Haitian and West Indian Domestic workers. Over 120 women have engaged in our program in the first year. In December 2013, we rebranded the Domestic Workers Project of Fairfield County to the Domestic Workers Project of Connecticut to better reflect plans to expand the program across the state.
All Workers Deserve Respect, Dignity & Labor Law Protection

Domestic Worker Project of Connecticut

DW trained in negotiation exercises and benefits of a work contract – 17
DW trained on how to make their own green cleaning products – 30

DW trained in nutrition for Hispanic Domestic workers. This is important learning for those who work with children and the elderly – 14

A gathering of 140 people (domestic workers, allies, supporters and volunteers) at the first ever Domestic Workers Congress on November 16 at St. John’s Church in Bridgeport. 80 of these were domestic workers who engaged in collective problem solving identifying problems they face in their workplace that lead to wage exploitation and they developed solutions on how to address these problems.

Worker Rights Education

We trained over 400 immigrant workers in workers’ rights and domestic workers through workshops at the Brazilian Traveling Consulate, church workshops, ESL programs and other venues between November 2012 and January 2014.

Construction Safety Training

To reduce the potential for deaths on construction sites, OSHA partners with immigrant worker centers to educate construction workers on the importance of proper safety procedures. In 2013, we trained over 60 Hispanic and Brazilian construction workers in Fall Protection procedures.

Issues Education in the Non-Immigrant Community

Between December 2012 and January 2013, we educated 725 members of the non-immigrant community in Connecticut on the struggles of immigrant workers and their families. Issues education included the impact of wage theft, historical exclusions facing domestic workers, and deportations.
Petra is a housecleaner from Puebla, Mexico, who has her own housecleaning business. She began participating in our Hispanic Domestic Worker program in September 2013 and has proven herself to be an exceptional leader. She has not always had her own business and once experienced exploitation as a helper. Her story was on the front page of the January 23rd edition of La Voz Hispana, a statewide Hispanic newspaper in Connecticut. Petra embodies the spirit of a true community leader; she has invited close to 20 other domestic workers to participate in our program. She accepts every opportunity presented to her to learn including visiting and networking other domestic worker groups, community organizations, and press interviews. She also sends clothing back to Mexico to help the disadvantaged in her hometown. She has become an active supporter of the St John’s Family Center Clothes Closet by donating clothes from her employers. She participates to learn and grow not just for herself, but for her community. Her family is very supportive and includes her husband, Portifirio, her stepsons, and her daughters Guadalupe and Sandy. Guadalupe is a dreamer and a student at Fairfield University. She is a movement leader in immigrant rights who led a civic engagement training along with other Connecticut Students for a Dream at our January 2014 Hispanic Domestic Workers Meeting. Sandy often helps out with childcare at our domestic worker meetings. Petra is rightly proud of her entire family!
Meet Our Newest Interns!

**Kathryn Pierce**
Kathryn Pierce is a junior at Sacred Heart University where she majors in sociology. Due to her strong love for people she is excited to work with domestic workers in the local community. She is also very interested in helping pave the way for new legislation, granting them more rights as well as in educating the public about the needs of those in the community.

**Michelle Rojas**
Michelle Rojas is a senior at Fairfield University. She is a double major in Accounting and International Business. Michelle lives on campus at Fairfield, but was born and raised in Stamford, Connecticut. She has been a nanny in New Canaan during the summer and during her free time she really enjoy cooking. She enjoys cooking because it gives her a way to express herself and be creative. Her favorite time of the year would have to be spring. She loves nature and its beauty and especially likes taking hikes.

**Gabrielle Abouzeide**
Gabrielle Abouzeide is an undergrad at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut where she is currently studying social work and psychology. She strongly believes in bettering humanity and in giving one’s all to help those that surround her. Gabrielle has participated in a number of clubs ranging from Build On to Habitat for Humanity. She plans on using her knowledge and understanding of the world to give back. Her goals include opening her own private practice and also traveling around the world to help those whose voices have been taken. She has worked as a domestic worker for over 6 years.
Our Domestic Worker Organizers!

Nelli Altamirano is the Hispanic Domestic Worker Organizer and was hired in June. Nelli was a social worker in Ecuador after having completed her bachelor’s degree. In the US, Nelli works as a caregiver for an elderly couple. She is proud mom to Cristina, age 11 and Sebastian, age 8.

Marla Sarubbi is the Brazilian Domestic Worker Organizer. Marla went to law school in Brazil before she immigrated to Connecticut where she has worked as a housecleaner for many years. She recently welcomed her mother and nephew for a six-month stay.

Carline St. Juste is the Haitian Domestic Worker Organizer. She emigrated from Haiti while a young teenager and learned how to speak English. She currently works in day care while also working with the Domestic Workers Project. She is a proud mom to Enock, a freshman and scholarship student at Western Connecticut State University and daughter Christy age 11.

Lorna Barrows is the West Indian Domestic Worker Organizer and is a full time nanny. She believes strongly in justice for all domestic workers. Originally from Jamaica, Lorna is the proud mother of three children, including her daughter Kerryann who will soon be graduating with her bachelor’s degree.
Volunteer Recognition

We are so grateful to all of our volunteers and supporters. St. John's Episcopal Church has been an important partner our first year. Without their support we would not have been able to start up our program. A few other volunteers should also be recognized: Pam Kopack of Christ and Holy Trinity Church of Westport who coordinates the Hispanic Domestic Worker Circle of Caring. Since May of 2013, Pam has been recruiting volunteers to cook the meals for the Hispanic domestic workers and their children and to provide child care. This has been a very successful partnership and has enabled us to grow our Hispanic domestic worker program.

Additionally, Noreen Noll, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Trumbull and a board member of Women of the ELCA in New England, has been a very special volunteer. Noreen and ladies from her church took up the challenge of providing the meal at the November meeting when CHT could not volunteer that month. Noreen has also been instrumental in recognizing these domestic workers and the Brazilian Immigrant Center was awarded a human rights award for our work by Church Women United in Bridgeport.

Pilar Munday, a professor of Spanish at Sacred Heart University, first participated in creating a Spanish script for a workers' rights play for Hispanic immigrant workers. Several of her Spanish students participated in a workers' rights theatre in April 2013 at an ESL program in Norwalk. Pilar and her students helped at the Domestic Worker Congress and helped provide child care for domestic workers taking computer classes through collaboration with the St. John's Family Center. Pilar also arranged for the Domestic Worker Project to speak at the colloquium at Sacred Heart, a program for first year students, on March 26th. Thank you for the efforts of these outstanding ladies! They exemplify the champions the Center needs to move forward in our work in Connecticut. And a deep appreciation is extended to all other volunteers that help us with our program who are not named here.

As our program has grown, we have also added new domestic worker organizers. Marla Sarubbi, a housecleaner, works with our Brazilian domestic workers, Nelli Altamirano, a caregiver for an elderly couple, works with our Hispanic domestic workers, and Lorna Barrows, a nanny, works with our West Indian Domestic Workers, and Carlene St Juste, who works in daycare, works with the Haitian domestic workers. Just this semester, we welcomed four new interns from Fairfield, Sacred Heart, and Housatonic. Kimaya Bramble started the first week of March. We welcome all of their talents!

Circle of Caring Partners Needed

The Circle of Caring partnership with Christ and Holy Trinity in Westport has been a vital component of developing and growing our domestic worker program. In a Circle Caring, faith organizations and community groups take up the important role of providing a healthy meal for domestic workers and their children and also provided childcare for the kids so the mothers can participate in the monthly meetings and workshops to learn and problem solve together. This Circle of Caring allows members of the dominant culture to care for these domestic workers two hours a month. Because this is only a monthly commitment, it is easier to find volunteers to engage. All age ranges of a church for example can participate in this program from the youth group to the altar guild.

The Circle of Caring represents a mutual and reciprocal relationship since domestic workers take care of us in the dominant culture and enable us to go out and pursue our professions. Members of Christ and Holy Trinity have embraced this opportunity to engage with domestic workers and have an opportunity to develop relationships with domestic workers who they might not otherwise encounter. At the December 2013 meeting, one volunteer exclaimed “This Christmas party last week was so much fun! It was so nice to see all the children and mothers and the music!” A high school student who cares for the children has said, “I’d love to come by the 24th. Thank you for the opportunity to help. Looking forward to seeing you in a couple of weeks.” Domestic Worker Circles of Caring will provide an opportunity for your community group to make a concrete difference in the lives of those in need and feel appreciated for that effort. These Circles of Caring are one way we can transform how our culture views domestic workers by facilitating interpersonal encounters and relationships between domestic workers and members of the dominant culture.

Please contact Meghan Vesel, Deputy Director at (404) 583-1682 if you are interested in exploring such a partnership or if you would like to visit our Hispanic Domestic Worker Circle of Caring the third Friday of the month at St. John’s Church in Bridgeport.
Connecticut’s 1ˢᵗ Domestic Worker Congress

On November 16th, 2013 the Brazilian Immigrant Center held it’s first Domestic Workers Congress in the state of Connecticut. This multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual event took place in the parish hall of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut. This location is of key importance because Bridgeport is the city with the second highest level of income inequality in the United States. On this historic day, the fruits of organizing resulted in attendance of 142 people including domestic workers and their children, movement leaders, supporters, staff and volunteers. Eighty-two housecleaners, nannies, and caregivers participated with the goal of defining the workplace justice issues that they wish to see addressed in the Bill of Rights in Connecticut.

The vulnerability of the domestic service workforce is increased because of the unregulated nature of the industry and resulting opportunity for exploitation. Thus for many of those that were in attendance this Congress was provided a strong sense of support and encouragement. For many this event was a day to celebrate but also on a more serious note it was a day to sit down together and really envision a different kind of future, one that is more socially and economically just.

At the heart of the Congress attendees were broken into 6 groups in which they together worked on compiling their wish list for how they envisioned how the new Domestic Worker Bill of Rights would address their problems. Talk amongst the groups was animated and engaging as workers shared their analysis of the major shortcomings of their jobs, and how new laws could give them more recognition for being the kind of caring professionals they knew

When the brainstorming sessions were over, a representative from each table explained the table’s key recommendations, in their own language, with their notes displayed. They received applause and encouragement from other Congress participants.

These were the results:

1. Fair pay and benefits are needed. This means regularizing the regular workweek and providing for overtime pay. Other compensation and fringe benefits needs are periodic pay raises, paid holidays, paid sick days, personal days, minimum rest/sleep periods, and specified, mandated break times.

2. Clear expectations and defined work duties. The specifics of the job assignment should be made clear in writing or in contracts – what is and is not part of the job. Hours, benefits, the provision of materials and other necessary working conditions should be specified as well.

3. Better protection for “the help” who work for schedule owners in housecleaning.

4. Health related protections. All domestic workers should be covered by workers compensation insurance, so that their injuries can be treated with no minimum or no cost to the worker.

5. All domestic workers should be treated with dignity and respect, as intelligent people who are providing much-needed professional services to employers. They should be not subject to insults, personal abuse, discrimination, and harassment. Some mentioned protection from sexual harassment was needed.

6. Training and professional development. There should be opportunities available for domestic workers to gain training and professional development related to their work duties.

7. Discrimination and harassment. Domestic workers should not be subject to harassment or discrimination on account of race, sexuality, immigrant status, or disability.

8. The right to organize into an employment-related association.
Thank You for Your Support!

Recognition of our Supporters and Volunteers


Pro Bono Legal Consultations: Danielle Briand of Esperanza Center for Law & Advocacy, Tokunbo Green and Dennis Bradley.


Trinity Church Southport: Patty Ford and Dawn Stegelmann

Unitarian Society of New Haven: Sarah Forman and Richard Weingarten

Caroline House: Sr. Peg Regan

Women of the ELCA of New England: Inez Torres Davis, Noreen Noll, Liz Burgess

Trinity Church Trumbull: Noreen Noll, Kathy Boor, and Karen Bangor

Presbyterian Women: Charlotte Hasselbarth, Joann Burrell, Virginia Champlin, Rita Hooper, Sandy Grillo, Judy Cunningham, Jeffrey Wood, Penny and John Webster

United Church Women of Bridgeport

St. Mark's: Micaela Porta, Martzi Eidelberg, Jan Maynes, Rev. Peter Walsh, Jennifer Walsh, Rev. Anne Richards, Thea McGee and Beth Ralston

Church of the Holy Spirit: West Haven – Rev. Lisa Hahneman

Grace Church Trumbull- Sarah Ginolfi, Elsa Worth, and Youth Group

Fairfield University: Julie Clothier, Astrid Quinones, Ciara O’Kane, John Harm, Melissa Quan, Jemain Griffin, Margo Ramlal-Nankoe

UU Society in Stamford: The Rev. Frances Sink
Connecticut Students for a Dream: Carolina & Camila Bortolleto, Lucas Condongnolla, Guadalupe Ramirez and all the Bridgeport members who attend our Jan. 24th Hispanic Domestic Workers Meeting


Unitarian Church of Westport: David Vita, Ruth Ahlers, Linda Hudson, Wendy Levy

UU Church Danbury – Rev. Barbara Fast

St. James’ Danbury – Rev. Joseph Krasinski

Tribuna Newspaper: Emanuela Leaf

Connecticut Legal Services: Nadine Nevins and Mark Moore

Yale Law School: Nicole Hallet

Haitian Voice: Angelucci Manigat

Domestic Worker Bill of Rights Team: James Bhandry-Alexander, Bev Brakeman, Paul Filson, Sam Gilchrist, Dan Jackson, Sarah Leiberman, Haeyoung Yoon & Stacey Zimmerman

CT Working Families: Lindsay Farrell

Connecticut Center a New Economy: Renae Reese

National Domestic Worker Alliance: Yomara Velez and Barbara Young

Domestic Workers United: Yvonne Ennis

International Institute of Connecticut: Alicia Kinsman

Junta New Haven: Ana Maria Rivera

32BJ: Alberto Bernardez and Sindri McDonald

Brazilian Immigrant Center Advisory Council: Cate Breslin, Debbie & Raul Chavez, Roy Fuchs, Tokunbo Green, Emanuela Leaf, Wendy Levy, Ana Siscar


Summer Intern: Jenny Kopack for donating over 80 hours of her time and doing outstanding work.
Brazilian Immigrant Center - Connecticut

Natalicia Tracy, Executive Director
Meghan Vesel, Deputy Director
(404) 583-1682 or (203) 540-5444
1067 Park Ave. Bridgeport, CT 06604

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