



# Annual Report 2019



429 Plymouth Avenue, Suite 1  
Buffalo, New York 14213  
716-884-0356  
[www.pushbuffalo.org](http://www.pushbuffalo.org)



## A Word from the Executive Director

Dear Beloved community,

This year our theme has been about deepening our collective impact and broadening our collective vision towards building the “Bigger We”. At PUSH, our work is intergenerational, multinational and our issues are intersectional. Our campaigns are local, state wide and national. Our coalition work has expanded dramatically resulting in historic legislative wins to benefit working class families in New York.

As founding members of the NY Renews coalition with nearly 200 organizational members across NY State, we passed the most ambitious and equitable climate legislation in the country - the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. With the Upstate/Downstate coalition, we won major legislation for tenant protections and will continue to fight for guaranteed quality, safe and permanently affordable housing for everyone. For each of these campaigns, hundreds of our community members filled buses to Albany to advocate for themselves and to meet with our elected officials.

In 2020, we will need to build an even “Bigger We” and we will need to collaborate even more deeply and support each other more intentionally, so that we continue to push for building the world that we all want to live in now and for the next seven generations. We are grateful to all the beautiful souls committed to social justice. We are grateful for your enduring support and faith.

In love and solidarity,

Rahwa Ghirmatzion



## A Word from our Board Chair

Last year, I ended my note in the 2018 annual report with the words “Growth is never easy. However, I am looking forward to another year of transformation, transition and healing for us all.” As I reflect on this past year, I realize that is exactly what 2019 brought for us at PUSH - growth. Growth is painful. It means letting go, trusting, investing in the unseen, shifting power dynamics, collaboration, isolation and that is A LOT of work. However, it is completely necessary for change to occur.

Throughout 2019 we focused our attention on making real change, and ensuring a just transition. We have seen tremendous growth in areas like our Hiring Hall, our work with NY Renews, and housing justice campaigns. We continue to invest in leaders in our community and uplift voices otherwise silenced or ignored. Thanks in large part to our leadership, we have continued to grow in transparency and collective understanding.

This work is REAL. Real hard, real exhausting, real heavy, real rewarding, real vulnerable, real worth it. We are worth it. Our communities are worth it. Because at the end of the day, we know we are also Real People who have Real Power. 2020, let's get REAL!

Nicolalita Rodriguez

# PUSH'S TOP 10 OF 2019

1

We worked hard along with local and State community partners in the NY Renews coalition to get the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) passed in New York State. This is one of the most ambitious climate laws passed in the country! **(page 3)**

2

We worked with comrades in People's Action and the Housing Justice for All coalition to create a platform for a Homes Guarantee, and pushed legislation to strengthen tenant protection and preserve housing affordability. A Homes Guarantee is the idea that housing is a human right, and that everyone deserves to have a quality affordable home to live in. **(page 4)**

3

The community started planning for a new slate of supportive, green affordable housing units to be built on Buffalo's West Side. Pre-development for the West Sides Homes project began in 2019 and is now ramping up in 2020. **(page 7)**

4

PUSH's workforce development efforts got a big boost with the announcement that New York State would invest in the construction of a new, sustainable workforce training center on the city's West Side. Once built, the center will provide space for training in solar and geothermal technology, as well as sustainable landscaping. **(page 7)**

5

We took almost 100 PUSH leaders to People's Action bi-annual conference in Washington, DC. People's Action is a national network of grassroots member-based organizations like PUSH Buffalo that build power to advance solutions to the crises of climate change, housing, healthcare, and mass incarceration.

6

Our annual Building Blocks breakfast fundraiser was a huge success! We raised over \$140,000 for the mission. Thanks to all who helped make it happen, donated, and participated. **(page 10)**

7

The emerging power of PUSH's Street Team and Youth Action Team was felt all over our neighborhood, city, region, state, and the country! Youth were developed to go out and build power in our community all year. The year ended on a powerful note with the Night of Power fundraiser and awards ceremony they organized in November. **(page 5)**

8

Cooperation Buffalo and PUSH Buffalo launched our first Co-op Academy. This a big leap for us and Buffalo in spreading the support for more, just business development through cooperative economics. **(page 8)**

9

PUSH Green's Warm and Dry on the West Side program provided funding to local residents struggling with high energy bills and deteriorating, unsafe, and unhealthy conditions in their homes, such as roof and basement leaks, broken heating systems, and mold and lead paint contamination. **(page 8)**

10

Added vital organizational capacity to meet the needs of a growing organization: a Finance Controller, Steve Freebern; created a New Economy Department to focus on Hiring Hall restructure, pursuit of Green Infrastructure Projects/Contracts and Cooperative Development **(page 8)**; and add two Deputy Directors to the Executive Team - promoting Dawn Wells-Clyburn to Deputy Director of Administration and hiring Harper Bishop as the Deputy Director of Movement Building.

*PUSH Buffalo's mission is to:*

- Mobilize residents to create strong neighborhoods with quality, affordable housing
- Expand local hiring opportunities
- Advance social, economic, and environmental justice in Buffalo



## The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act Passes!

It was a landmark year for Climate Justice in New York State which is due in no small part to the tireless and passionate work of PUSH's Eco Justice Team and our previous Climate Justice Organizer, Geovaira Hernández.

The PUSH Eco Justice Team built power through cultural organizing which centers the lived experiences, stories, joy and resilience of our communities and channels that collective energy into real and lasting change for our people and planet.

The emergent Eco Justice Team worked in coalition with NY Renews, a statewide coalition of over two hundred climate and environmental justice organizations throughout New York State, to pass the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) in June of 2019! This landmark legislation mandates net-zero fossil fuel emissions in New York State by 2050 and centers poor and working-class communities and communities of color who have been most impacted by the deadly effects of environmental racism and classism by directing existing climate funds to support clean energy projects, green jobs, resilience programs and other work that lives out our values of "the people who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution".



### What does the CLCPA state?

- Mandates an 85% direct reduction in greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors of the New York State economy by 2050
- Fully transitions the electricity generation sector off of fossil fuels by 2040
- Requires a minimum of 35% of the benefits of spending on clean energy and energy efficiency are directed to disadvantaged communities
- Sets aggressive goals for increased deployment of solar, offshore wind, battery storage, energy efficiency, and geothermal and air source pumps beginning in 2025



## Climate and Housing Justice

Over the course of the year, the Organizing Team mobilized over 200 leaders from throughout Buffalo into powerful action. Our Climate and Housing Justice Organizers and their powerful leadership teams held countless campaign meetings, lobby trips to Albany and Washington, DC, political education and skills trainings, direct actions and more to build the power our movements need to stop the bad of our extractive economy and build the new living and regenerative economy our communities need and deserve.



**TOP to BOTTOM:** Eco Justice Team at the Youth Climate Strike in September; Geovaira Hernández and Lonnie Barlow at a New York Renews rally; PUSH Eco Justice Team at a CLCPA rally in Buffalo in May; Long time PUSH volunteer Luz "Lucy" Velez in front of Assembly Majority Leader Crystal People-Stokes Buffalo office.

# The Emergency Tenant Protection Act Passes!

2019 was a powerful year for the Housing Justice Movement highlighted by the passage of the Emergency Tenant Protection Act. Members and staff played a key role in moving the 9 Bills passed in New York State - meeting with our State Representatives and hosting events and trainings around tenant rights.

Two years ago, PUSH members and staff participated in a retreat to relaunch People's Action's National Housing Campaigns and the #HomesGuarantee was born. In 2020 we plan to launch a website, briefing book, training program and state campaign framework. The hashtag, principals and policies have been uplifted in Bernie Sanders Housing Plan and a package of bills introduced by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Talib and Prayima Jaypal. We are moving the conversation about universal rent control, just cause eviction and social housing.

While building national and statewide momentum, we have been working with tenants on the ground to help them in housing court as well as connect them to a larger movement through our Tenant Power Meetings and Trainings. We're working with tenants directly and identifying the problems tenants face so policy solutions can be developed from the ground up. Tenants from Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, Big Developers and low-level slumlords have been coming together to show solidarity with each other in battles with their landlords and share stories and best practices.

Pine Harbor residents shared concerns this summer over the decades of the building's neglect, so we went through months of meetings to prepare for a direct action that lead to the Vice President of Related Management Companies owned by Billionaire Steven Ross to finally start repairs. After exposing the owner and his enormous wealth, their Vice President flew to Buffalo to negotiate with tenants on repairs. Since then, over 400 backlogged work orders have been completed, with plans to do 70 more, including pest control, led by the needs and direction of residents.

## What does the Emergency Tenant Protection Act state?

- Enables municipalities to opt-in to rent stabilization
- Gives tenants the right to a renewal lease
- Provides protections from sudden rent hikes and retaliatory evictions
- Applies to buildings with six or more apartments built before 1974



**TOP to BOTTOM:** Scene from the #NYHomesGuarantee campaign launch; PUSH Board Member, Shirley Sarmiento, speaking at a Housing Justice For All coalition press conference for a #NYHomesGuarantee on the Million Dollar Staircase at the Capitol in Albany; Aminah Johnson (Center) in action leading a protest with local tenants.

## Did you know?

PUSH has a tenant advocate on staff, dedicated to supporting tenants dealing with inadequate housing conditions and neglectful landlords and property managers. Helping tenants on the West, East, North and South sides of Buffalo, Aminah Johnson goes wherever her services are needed. Often acting as a mediator between tenants and landlords, she aims to get repairs done using her deep knowledge and years of experience upholding tenants' rights.



**LEFT:** Our Street Team is the future; **RIGHT:** The Street Team and Youth Action Team went on a trip to Richmond, California to learn about Climate and Housing Justice with our movement partners - Top: Rich City Rides, Bottom: Movement Generation.

## Street Team & Youth Action Team

The PUSH Street Team is dedicated to having a daily presence in PUSH's organizing zone through door-to-door knocking, one-to-one meetings, and phone calls. Comprised of youth leaders from our neighborhood, the Street Team connects with the community by speaking with Buffalo residents, building relationships, and recognizing the intersectionality of all the issues we work on. The Youth Action Team is a team of high school age leaders who speak directly to the issues that impact their lives on a daily basis, including transportation and education

This past year, our team powered through the civic engagement aspect of organizing. They contacted over 25,000 voters by either text, phone or by knocking on doors. They attended public forums, gave countless interviews on behalf of themselves and the community, and packed busses on trips to Albany to fight on the front lines of social justice. The two teams have grown in their political analysis, as well as their practical knowledge of registering non-prime voters and how to win campaigns on issues that directly impact their lives, including the climate crisis, education, transportation, and, of course, housing.

The Street Team, Youth Action Team and Grant Street Neighborhood Center staff traveled to Richmond, California in December to learn from our movement partners. The Teams had the incredible opportunity to learn, see and practice Just Transition work with Movement Generation, the Ryse Center, Urban Tilth and Rich City Rides. They also co-lead an organizing training for their peers to share the PUSH spirit and skills to their comrades across the country working for climate and housing justice!

“Comprised of youth leaders from our neighborhood, the Street Team connects with the community by speaking with Buffalo residents, building relationships, and recognizing the intersectionality of all the issues we work on.”

## Spotlight on the Grant Street Neighborhood Center's (GSNC) New Fashion and Design Program:

The Fashion and Design Program was designed *with* and *for* the young people who make the GSNC a vibrant and beautiful community hub on the West Side. This program will create a space for youth to bring their passion for fashion alive while learning new skills in the whole spectrum of the fashion industry from design, construction, photography, sustainability and community building. These folks have a vision to not only share who they are as individuals but also the richness of their cultures through their clothing and stories.

In a world with so much suffering and injustice, these dynamic and resilient leaders have identified an outlet for joy, community organizing and resistance through self-expression and cultural sharing. Too often fashion is seen as frivolous and unimportant, but these folks are making a statement that what's often seen as "women's work" is radical work and they're going to have a good time doing it!

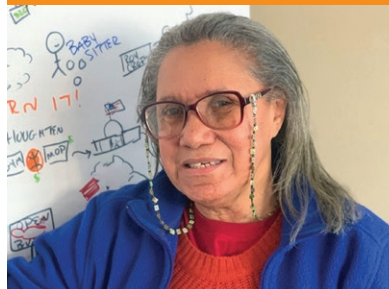
The GSNC Fashion and Design Program will begin through a generous partnership with Erin Habes of Buffalo State College's Fashion and Textile Technology Program.

### *What is the Grant Street Neighborhood Center (GSNC)?*

The Grant Street Neighborhood Center serves over 60 people every day, most of whom are youth between 10 and 20 years of age. Our open, safe and productive space provides daily activities and programming infused with opportunities, building critical consciousness through participatory education. Youth come in to do homework, use one of our 10 computers, play board games, read books, or play on our PS3.

### *What is PUSH Silver?*

PUSH Silver advocates for seniors age 55+ of low income. The division currently consists of Provy, Luz Velez, Maxine Murphy, Bob Yankee, Felicita Cintron, and Michael Cureton. PUSH Silver is always looking for new members! Contact Provy if you'd like to learn more at [carrpmarie@gmail.com](mailto:carrpmarie@gmail.com).



## Meet Provy Carrion

Providencia "Provy" M. Carrion - Educator and Activist - arrived from Puerto Rico at the age of ten-and-a-half. Her father, who had already been working in the States for five-years, had recently moved from Florida, where he worked on an oil rig.

Provy grew up on Swan Street on the East Side of Buffalo with four of her five siblings. Her education initially took her to Fosdick-Masten all-girls vocational school (now City Honors) where she learned how to be a seamstress.

It was working Saturdays and Sundays in the food service department at Mercy Hospital that eventually motivated Provy's decision to go back to school. In 1971, she became a teacher's assistant in the Buffalo Public Schools, teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at P.S. #6, Grover Cleveland, #77, #38, and #19, where she retired in 2001.

During this period, she eloped with her husband, had five children, and began her activism, traveling across the country on behalf of the Buffalo Board of Education. She visited cities across the United States with her mentor Mr. Confesor Cruse, then Director of the Buffalo Public School's ESL program, including Washington D.C., St. Louis, Texas, Virginia, and Kentucky, advocating and learning how to improve children's literacy. It was "like a mini-PUSH," according to Provy.

Provy first found out about PUSH when she arrived at a housing meeting at 271 Grant Street in 2007. Since then she has been an active recruiter for PUSH, initially by marching against Governor Pataki and National Fuel, and advocating for the HEAP program. In 2010 she became a part of the Energy Democracy Committee (EDC).

This self-described "calm but edgy" veteran, co-founded PUSH Silver along with Luz Velez and Aaron Bartley.



**TOP to BOTTOM:** Small groups gathered in one of the many community planning meetings for the West Side Homes Project; Many local officials showed up to support the groundbreaking of 417 Mass; STWC Worker Focus Group.

## Building Sustainable Affordable Housing

In 2019, PUSH's affordable housing arm, Buffalo Neighborhood Stabilization Company, Inc. (BNSC), planned, started construction, and closed out several projects:

- We completed leasing up of the apartments and commercial spaces at School 77, and converted project construction funds to longer term permanent financing.
- With construction financing in place, we started rehabilitation at 417 Massachusetts to create 9 affordable apartments and 1 commercial space for the WASH project laundromat and arts center.
- We continued construction at the 236 Normal Training House with partners Youth Build and Assembly House 150. Over 60 youth received training at the site in areas such as carpentry, flooring, landscaping, painting, and drywalling.

It was also a year of planning for two new major projects: The first is the **Sustainable Workforce Training Center**, which will be built at the PUSH work yard on Hampshire and house the Hiring Hall and training programs in green construction. The second is **West Side Homes**, a housing project that will include 53 apartments on 12 sites around the West Side, with a focus around School 77 and the GSNC. The project will include supportive housing units in partnership with Best Self Behavioral Health and will be PUSH's most sustainable project, including energy efficient design, clean heating and cooling technologies, and solar!

## Policy and Strategy

The Policy and Strategy department at PUSH continued to provide policy advocacy, strategic communications, and community energy planning support to the organization and its base of grassroots leaders. Highlights included:

- Planning and community engagement with PUSH Community Hiring Hall workers around a new **Sustainable Workforce Training Center**.
- Members of PUSH's Community Energy Working Group kicked off a **West Side Community Energy Roadmap project** in partnership with the University at Buffalo. The Roadmap seeks to gather baseline energy consumption and utility bill data from community residents and to analyze the data in relation to key demographic and environmental justice indicators, the location of existing energy infrastructure, available green jobs, and current and potential investments in clean energy technologies. The Roadmap will help democratize knowledge of community energy needs and assets, and will foster community self-determination in the pursuit of a Just Transition.
- The department launched a bi-lingual (English-Spanish) version of its monthly newsletter, boosted its web presence through redevelopment of the PUSH website, and initiated an organizational transition to a new Salesforce relationship management database.



## PUSH Green

PUSH Green wrapped another productive year promoting clean energy and energy efficiency programs in poor and working class communities across Western NY.

PUSH Green partnered with Ujima Co. Inc., a local multi-ethnic and multicultural theater collective, to co-host a production of Free Fred Brown, a Just Transition story that unfolds in a community not unlike the West Side. Later in the year, PUSH Green worked with the Community Network for Engagement, Connection, and Transformation (CoNECT) to spotlight the intersecting crises of lead poisoning and healthy homes at a community event at School 77.

In 2019, the PUSH Green team referred 250 residents to NYSERDA programs and directed over \$160,000 of supplemental grant funding for roof repair and environmental remediation to community members in the 14213 zip code. PUSH Green remains a fierce advocate of a community-based approach to meeting people's basic needs around healthy, safe, and energy efficient housing for all.



*Our PUSH Green team - Natalie Correa-Rodriguez, Jason Posner, and Lou DeJesus.*

## Introducing: The New Economy Department

In 2019 PUSH formed a new department, bringing on two co-directors to steward PUSH's social justice enterprises and expand our efforts to strengthen a community-controlled economy. For PUSH, building the New Economy means restoring old cultural traditions of caring, sacredness, and cooperation that have existed in the economies of indigenous peoples, communities of color, and other marginalized communities for thousands of years.

### *Cooperation Buffalo Joins the PUSH Family*

To build our capacity to start and grow businesses owned and controlled by the community, we welcomed Cooperation Buffalo to our team. We held the first 12-week Cooperative Academy training program, working with 35 co-op entrepreneurs. Cooperation Buffalo is also a member of Seed Commons, a national community wealth cooperative that provides non-extractive loans to cooperatively-owned businesses.

### *Solidifying our Commitment to Sustainability*

We also created the position of Sustainability Planning Manager, who works in the intersection of climate, housing, and new economic models of development. A 2019 highlight was developing PUSH's Sustainability Guidelines, a guiding document for sustainability goals in the architecture, engineering, and system design on all land development.

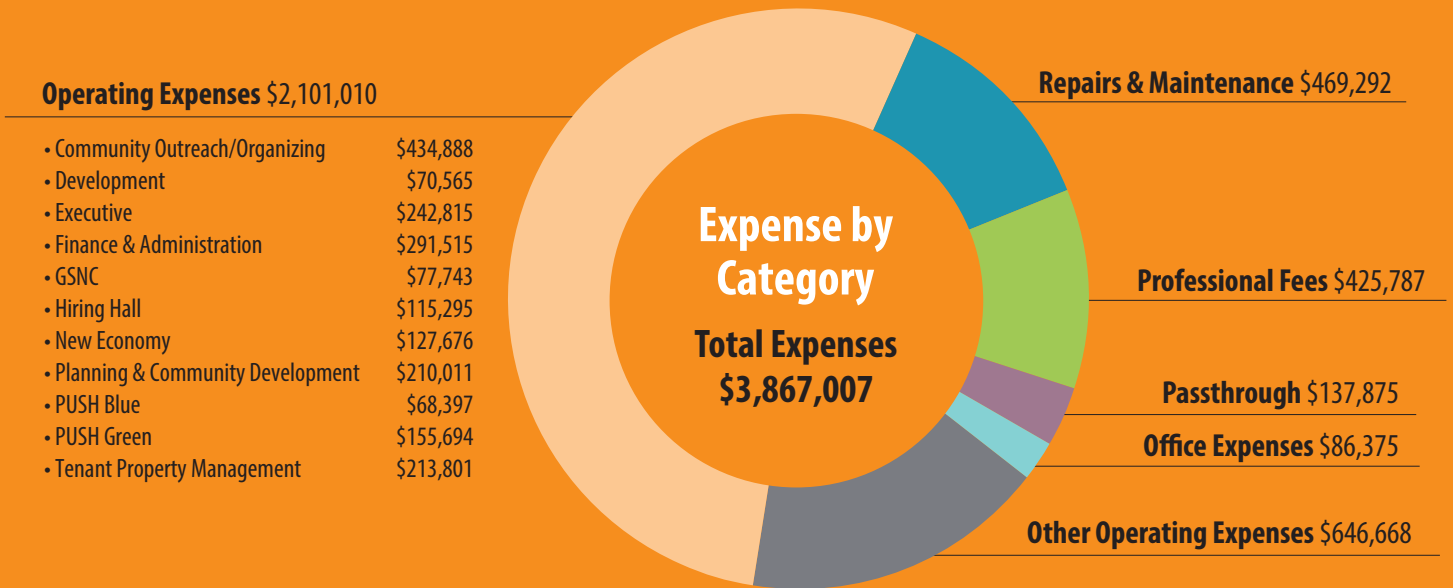
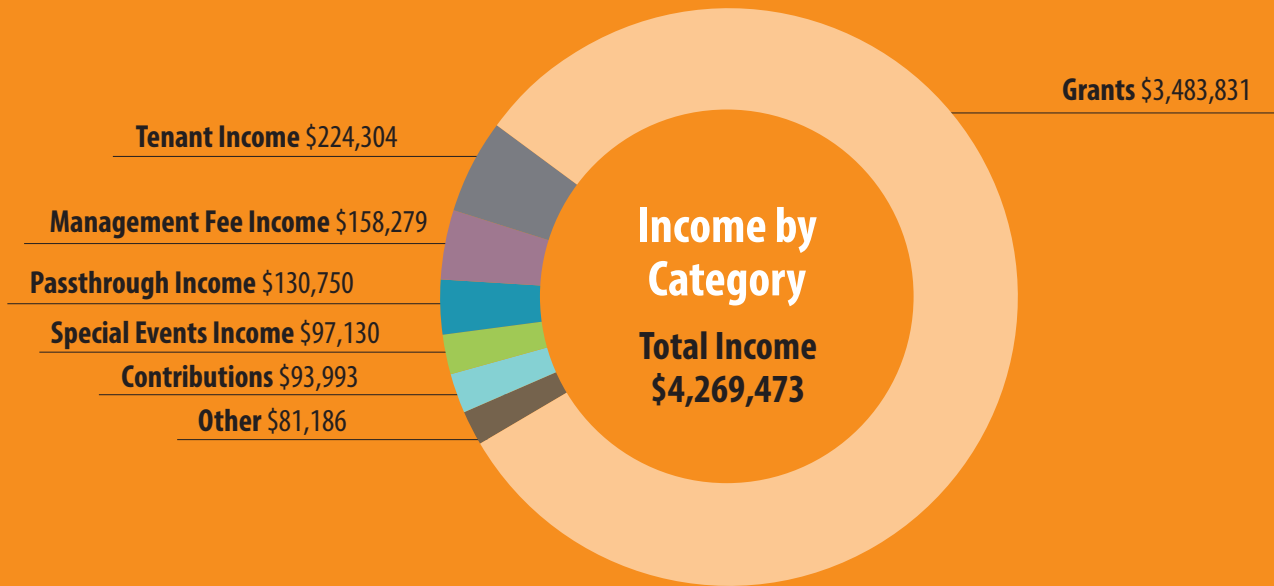
### *The Hiring Hall Continues to Expand*

To ensure our community members have access to good green jobs, PUSH's Community Hiring Hall brought on a Workforce Coordinator, started a Worker Coaching program, supported 15 active workers, and supported 35 additional job placements.

### *PUSH Blue promotes Green Infrastructure*

To heal the earth and its people, PUSH Blue continued promoting, installing, and maintaining green infrastructure throughout the City of Buffalo, including installing over 200 additional native plants at School 77 and beginning a collaboration in Buffalo's Coppertown neighborhood.

# 2019 FINANCIAL REPORT



**Total Net Income for 2019**  
**\$402,466**

*\* PUSH Income and Expense numbers are preliminary, unaudited drafts.*



## 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Building Blocks Breakfast

It was another successful year at the Building Blocks Breakfast - the room was buzzing as Rahwa shared the ways in which PUSH is striving to Build a Bigger 'We'. Cynthia and David Silverstein capped the event with their motivation for being a part of the PUSH Buffalo community, and a call-to-action to provide support if able. \$140,000 was raised for PUSH Buffalo on October 24 thanks to our incredible supporters! We couldn't do this work without you!

*Thank you to our Table Captains who made this event a success:* Maggie Best, Barbara Bono, Hadar Borden, Kevin & Terri Campbell, Provy Carrion, Mary Collins, Ellen Daly, Ty DiMatteo, Joanne Kahn, Linda Angert Kahn, Emily Louis, Colleen Kristich, Laura Mangan, Holly Mergenhagen, Stahlka Agency, Kevin Ross, Lynda Schneekloth, Catie Stephenson, Luz Velez, Bill Wachob, John Wood

*Thank you to our top sponsors:* M&T Bank, RP Oak Hill, Cannon Heyman Weiss, Northwest Charitable Foundation, Dolce Panepinto, Independent Health, SAA|EVI, Ellen Daly, and Rigidized Metals.

### *Special Thank You to our 2019 Development Committee for your year-round planning!*

Larry Rubin ( <i>Chair</i> )	Ellen Daly	Holly Mergenhagen
Stuart Angert	Ty DiMatteo	Shirley Sarmiento
Barbara Bono	Linda Angert Kahn	Bill Wachob
Kevin Campbell	Laura Mangan	

## Thank You!

### *2019 Board of Directors*

Nicolalita Rodriguez ( <i>Chair</i> )	Nakia Hock
Ramone Alexander ( <i>Treasurer</i> )	Robert Jahnke
Carl Nightingale ( <i>Secretary</i> )	Heidi I. Jones
Rigena Allen	Da'Von McCune
John Buckley	Shirley Sarmiento
Felicita Cintron	

### *PUSH Eco Justice Committee*

## 2019 Funding Partners

11th Hour Project  
 Affordable Housing Corporation  
 Catholic Campaign for Human Development  
 Chorus Foundation - Mott Philanthropic  
 City of Buffalo  
 Empire State Development  
 Funders Network  
 IIE  
 JPB Foundation  
 Kendeda Fund  
 Key Bank Foundation  
 Kresge Foundation  
 Local Initiatives Support Corp.  
 NY Dept. of State  
 NY Immigration Coalition  
 NY Renews  
 NYSERDA  
 People's Action Institute  
 Pisces Foundation  
 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
 Rowboat Foundation  
 Seventh Generation  
 Surdna Foundation  
 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
 UU Veatchat Shelter Rock  
 Water Alliance  
 The Working World

PUSH Buffalo  
429 Plymouth Avenue, Suite 1  
Buffalo, NY 14213



## Help Us Build a Bigger We

### *Make a Gift*

Visit [www.pushbuffalo.org](http://www.pushbuffalo.org) and click "Donate" to make a secure online donation today! Contact Emily at [elouis@pushbuffalo.org](mailto:elouis@pushbuffalo.org) if you have any questions or would like to give over the phone.

### *Get Involved*

Become a PUSH member! Email [kat@pushbuffalo.org](mailto:kat@pushbuffalo.org) if you are interested in becoming a member, attending a monthly meeting, or a committee.

### *Join the Conversation*

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



@pushbuffalo



@pushbluewny



@pushgreenwny