

Advocacy in action: Monroe Community 4 Change



It all started with an idea, some initiative and a little inspiration. When Francesca Tuturro, a resident of Stroudsburg, was working as a volunteer community organizer for Barack Obama's presidential campaign, she heard a common theme as she knocked on doors and listened as citizens expressed their concerns: That access to a quality public education is vital to the success of students, the depth of the region's workforce and the viability of communities in Monroe County. Once the election was finished and won, Tuturro reached out to fellow campaign veterans in Monroe County with the idea that through grassroots organizing, real change for education and other important issues could be achieved. Monroe Community 4 Change was born.

"Monroe Community 4 Change welcomes citizens who, through local and state reforms, want to improve their community and region," said Tuturro. "In essence, we are a multi-issue group and a support system for those who want to make a difference but don't think they can do it alone. It turns out they're not alone because we all want change and we're all working together to achieve it."

At a recent meeting, the group entertained three action items: Ensuring education accountability in their local school districts, advocating for a high-speed commuter rail line that would run from Scranton to New York City, and protecting open space from unplanned development in Monroe County's outer suburbs and green spaces. Lead organizers were appointed and action plans developed. First on the list: Call the Stroudsburg School District's superintendent to schedule a meeting to learn more about how the district plans to use the increased funding it received through the new school funding formula. The group was in agreement that using their organizing and advocacy skills to preserve Pennsylvania's new, more equitable school funding formula and ensuring that state funds were being spent in ways that meet the needs of students in the community would be a major step in improving schools and attracting residents to Monroe's declining older communities.

Tuturro insists that Monroe Community 4 Change's model is both simple and effective: "Our group is composed of people who are directly affected by the issues we seek to improve and change. Without that struggle, without that passion of having lived these issues every day, we might only be able to see superficial solutions. But we have a vested interest in making sure we're successful and that the solutions are meaningful and bring about real reforms."

As the group continues to meet, as it continues to explore areas of action and advocacy, and as its membership grows stronger and more dedicated to the causes that bound them together in service to their communities and region, Tuturro has noticed that other community members in the region are beginning to form and are replicating Monroe Community 4 Change's model. "We are

excited to collaborate with them, to share ideas and to work together on areas of common interest. After all, there is so much to be done and we have found strength in numbers.”

For information on Monroe Community 4 Change, to track the group’s progress or learn how you can get involved, [email](#) Francesca Tuturro or visit the group’s [website](#).