Dear Hand in Hand Community,

As we look toward 2013, we know that building our movement for a more just and caring society is as important as it’s ever been.

We know that we need each other. We know that most of us, over the course of our lives, depend on support from our families, our communities, and safety net programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Many of us also rely on domestic workers.

That’s why Hand in Hand honors the care work that happens every day in homes across our country.

Hand in Hand brings together individuals and families who depend on nannies, house cleaners, and home care attendants. We work together to create homes that are full of dignity and love. Homes that are workplaces. Workplaces that are homes. We seek to end the isolation of both workers and employers and ensure that all are able to live full, vibrant lives.

Hand in Hand is committed to providing domestic employers with the information and support they need to develop the mutually respectful and caring employment relationships that they want.

Together, we are building a movement, home by home.

In partnership with the National Domestic Workers Alliance and others, Hand in Hand works to change cultural norms and government policies so that the domestic work industry works for everyone.

We have made great strides in our first two years and I look forward to what we will achieve in the future. We are in this for the long haul and we are in it together.

With Respect,

Danielle Feris
National Director
Lindsay Imai, Hand in Hand leader and nanny employer:

When I returned to work four months after giving birth, I knew that whoever was going to care for Yuji would have to be special. I think all parents feel like that. I was grateful to find Jessica, a mother herself who brought enthusiasm, love of play, and a sense of responsibility to her work.

I have always been committed to being a good employer. That said, I haven’t always known how to do that, and I know that I am not alone.

Hand in Hand provides the opportunity to learn how to be a more responsible employer, and to share what I have learned with other parents.

Since January 2011, Hand in Hand has organized with the CA Domestic Workers Coalition as part of the California Domestic Workers Bill of Rights campaign. In support of the Bill of Rights, Hand in Hand members marched, rallied, lobbied, spoke to the press, signed postcards, made phone calls, painted banners, danced in flash mobs, canvassed at farmers markets, participated in dialogues, facilitated educational forums, and so much more.

The Bill of Rights aims to end the historical exclusion of domestic workers from basic labor protections like meal and rest breaks and overtime, while also providing rights unique to the industry, like uninterrupted sleep and access to kitchen facilities. Due to a year and a half of steadfast organizing and coalition-building, we saw significant victories when the bill passed first through the Assembly in Spring 2011, and then the Senate in Summer 2012.

Governor Brown made the unpopular decision to veto the bill on September 30, 2012 but this has only strengthened the commitment of domestic workers and their partners to work together for change.

Nikki Brown-Booker, Coordinator of Hand in Hand Bay Area Senior/Disability Working Group:

I have had a disability all my life and started employing home attendants at 18 years old. Every time I do a lobby visit for the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights with domestic workers, it reinvigorates me to do the work with Hand in Hand.

It is powerful for the legislators to hear both sides of the story and see that we have come together. It makes them take notice.

When Governor Brown vetoed the Bill of Rights, I realized how important Hand in Hand’s work is. Some of my attendants work for other employers, and they complain about how that person doesn’t treat them well. It’s often not about the money; the workers feel that the employers don’t really care about them. Neither workers nor employers want to feel disrespected.

My mother is 79 years old and I think about hiring workers for her. If someone is taking care of my mom I want to make sure they are taken care of too.

Celebrity nanny-employer Amy Poehler helped the cause by speaking out in support of the CA Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (Click on Amy to watch her PSA).

I enjoyed reaching out to the other parents at the Mother’s Day event at Lake Merritt Park in Oakland to talk about the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. Most parents I approached got it right away.
Rachel McCullough, JFREJ Community Organizer, Shalom Bayit: Justice For Domestic Workers Campaign:

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) is committed to supporting the leadership of low-income people and communities of color in New York City who are the targets of oppression. We work with domestic employers, who have their own struggles and anxieties surrounding their employment relationships.

In our organizing, we help employers see how their struggles are not individual problems to be dealt with in isolation, but are connected to larger systems. Having Hand in Hand leaders in New York City who are also engaged in domestic employer organizing on a national level—the 30,000 feet view—has been tremendously helpful. It means a lot to our employer leaders in Brooklyn that the national movement is looking to them to organize alongside New York domestic workers and to make history once again.

Gayle Kirshenbaum, Hand in Hand leader and member of Employer Strategy Group, Park Slope, Brooklyn:

On an afternoon in late October, hours before the New York City subway was shut down in preparation for Hurricane Sandy, members of our Employer Strategy Team braved the gathering winds to attend a meeting about our Code of Care project. Given the conditions, the turnout was great, an indication of how compelling this project is to our group.

We are former and current employers of nannies and we’ve come together for many reasons: some of us have set up good working relationships with the workers in our homes and want to help other employers do the same; some of us want to help new employers avoid our mistakes, remembering how overwhelmed we were by new parenthood and how difficult it was to find information about how to become employers in our own homes.

Most of us came out on that hurricane Sunday because we were captivated by the possibility of establishing a new community standard for domestic work in Park Slope, Brooklyn, which might one day serve as a model for the rest of our state and beyond.

Gayle Kirshenbaum and her family, NYC Care Congress, May 2012
Photo credit: JFREJ

New York: Hand in Hand Helps Launch “Code of Care”

Two years after New York became the first state in the nation to pass the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, Hand in Hand is building on this victory, working with our partners to develop innovative new models to implement and expand standards in the domestic work industry.

In 2012, in our partnership with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), Hand in Hand helped build a strategy team of 20 nanny employers from Park Slope, Brooklyn. We worked with Domestic Workers United to draft a set of neighborhood standards for domestic employment called a Code of Care.

In 2013, Hand in Hand will help launch the Code of Care project. We will pilot new resources that respond directly to employers’ needs and questions.

Hand in Hand aims to bridge the public and the private, helping employers recognize that they are not isolated, that they live in broader community with other families engaging care workers, and with the workers who provide that care.
The baby-boomer population is getting older—every eight seconds someone in this country turns 65.

Hand in Hand is a founding member of the Caring Across Generations (CAG) campaign, which aims to transform the direct care industry so that everyone can age with dignity and ensure that the workers who support us can have quality jobs, job training and a path to citizenship.

CAG is supported by more than 200 organizations, including unions, think tanks, policy groups, and senior and disability rights organizations, and is led by the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Jobs with Justice.

Sascha Bittner, Hand in Hand member and Policy Director, Caring Across Generations:

As my father continues to get support from personal attendants, I value guidance from Hand in Hand about how to help him ensure the relationships remain mutually supportive.

The Caring Across Generations campaign has no doubt been strengthened by the thoughtful participation of Hand in Hand. Hand in Hand’s leadership in framing, developing, and presenting a training for the Caring Across Generations Leadership Team about disability and ableism was invaluable.

As the Caring Across Generations coalition works to develop federal legislation, Hand in Hand representatives always speak authentically and push the coalition to work towards consensus when we can and respectfully acknowledge differences where we need to.

I am grateful for all the good work Hand in Hand did in 2012 and look forward to doing more good work together in 2013.

Sascha Bittner, Hand in Hand member (Excerpt from her Op-ed, San Jose Mercury News, August 7, 2012):

I proudly shared the stage with President Obama at a December press conference in which he announced his administration’s proposal for new labor regulations that give home care workers the same basic labor rights guaranteed to most other American workers.

The President’s proposal would extend minimum wage and overtime pay to workers who provide services and supports for elders and people with disabilities....

I have been a disability rights advocate my entire life—first as a child advocating for accessible public transportation; later advocating for the right to live independently with the help of attendants; and finally, working for fair pay, respect and dignity for the attendants who assist me....

In reality, seniors, people with disabilities, domestic workers, and our allies are all part of the same community, with lives and fates that are intimately entwined.