

CARECEN Notes

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CARECEN Attorney Derails Deportation

CARECEN attorney, Daniel Sharp, received a desperate phone call from a relative of two Guatemalan women being held in detention in Arizona. Their deportation orders were in effect and their flight back to Guatemala had been scheduled; could CARECEN help?

Sharp traveled to Arizona and met with 'Juana' and 'Maria' at a detention center, gathering important information that both women had been afraid to reveal out of concern for their loved ones still in Guatemala.

This information, along with newly acquired documents from Guatemala, persuaded the Department of Homeland Security to take the unusual step of granting a new credible fear interview to Juana and Maria prior to their deportation. The Department of Homeland Security then determined that both women were entitled to a full hearing before an immigration judge, where they may present their asylum cases.

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CARECEN volunteers and staff join with Cris Gutierrez, Director, CIVITAS School of Learning School (far left, front row), Board Member Monica Garcia (middle, front row) and LAUSD administrator Edmundo Rodriquez (3rd from left, back row) to celebrate the unanimous LAUSD Board ratification of the Educational Pilot Program, Zone of Choice, at recent LAUSDF Board meeting. Also shown are CARECEN staff Marvin Andrade, (far left, back row), Mireya Garcia, Sophia and Anne Montezano (right to left of M. Garcia)

See Historic Commitment, page three.

How to Change From Occasional Voter to Civic Activist

When CARECEN Civic Participation Program Director, Sergio Barahona, first designed the voter outreach and program for 16 precincts in Pico Union, he chose to target Latino surname voters with a record of occasional voting. He stated, "I like a challenge and I felt that there was a tremendous untapped potential in this group."

His first challenge was to increase the level of voter participation; records now show that participation was increased by 10% in the precincts targeted by CARECEN in the November 2006 general election.

"The larger challenge for me was to transform occasional voters in civic activists," he continued. The first step was to find out what voters felt were their most important quality of life issues. Through surveys taken by the voter outreach canvassers, the top issues of concern were identified as healthcare, housing, education, employment, public disturbances and gang activity.

Following the November 2006 election, Barahona went back to the voters now helps them develop Neighbor Circles where members who live in each precinct attend workshops on local

government, how a bill becomes law, electing officers, organizing teach-ins, creating petition drives, writing letters to elected officials and raising funds to support their work. They also train to make presentations and speak out at meetings with local officials and official decision-making bodies such as Neighborhood Councils.

Xiomara Ajuria, a voting campaign participant and a Neighbor Circle member, stated, "What I like most about the Neighbor program is the hands-on approach: we learn by doing." Through trainings and discussions, members learn to work collectively to pinpoint problems in their neighborhoods and to reach consensus on how to resolve them.

Xiomara further explains that this process helps Circle members become more confident and independent citizens. She added, "This type of community activism has transformed our lives. We learn to advocate for improvements in the quality of our neighborhood and, at the same time, see that we can have an impact on public policies."

The voter participation project is supported by a grant from the James Irving Foundation's California Votes Initiative.

From the Executive Director:

Dear Friends,

2007 promises to be an exciting and challenging year for CARECEN, and for me personally. After 12 years of serving as the Executive Director of CARECEN I have decided to transition to serve full time as the President of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC).

Over the last 12 years, with the support of CARECEN's Board of Directors, strong and committed staff and community participation, CARECEN has experienced extraordinary growth. In 1996 we purchased and renovated our present facility which is the largest Central American Resource Center in the United States where, through our integrated program strategy of service, education, advocacy and organizing, we served over 70,000 people last year.



As we celebrate last year's historic mobilizations we applaud the tenacity of the immigrant community who, with great courage, continue to struggle for justice and for a fair and humane immigration reform.

The historic agreement between UTLA and the LAUSD to establish a network of ten autonomous small secondary schools -- the Belmont Zone of Choice -- is another example of what strong partnerships between parents, students, teachers, and administrators can do to bring about reform in the educational system

I want to specially thank CARECEN's donors. Your support has made our progress possible.

Si se puede,

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Deportation Halted, from page 1

The campesino community where Juana and her daughter-in-law Maria were born has been immersed in one of the land struggles resulting from the governmental refusal to implement land reform as charged by the 1996 Peace Accords. The centuries' old problems of inequality and poverty persist. Many campesino communities have been evicted from their lands by police or large landowners' private security forces in recent years. Though Guatemalan President Oscar Berger promised to prioritize agrarian problems during his political campaign, he has offered no concrete land proposal and the number of evictions of campesinos has drastically increased since he took office.

The family of Juana and Maria championed their community's movement for reform. As a result, several members of their immediate family had been murdered or disappeared in the past year and half. Though they fled Guatemala after receiving death threats from the same security forces that killed or

disappeared several other family members, Juana and Maria feared discussing many of the details about who was responsible for these atrocities after they were apprehended by Immigration & Customs enforcement at the end of 2006.

Just weeks after being on the brink of deportation (and likely death) to Guatemala, Juana and Maria have now been released from detention and are reunited with their surviving family members in California.

CARECEN will represent them in their asylum hearing at the Los Angeles Immigration Court.

CARECEN Legal Services receives support from the Los Angeles County Bar Association and contributions from the community.

Historic Commitment to Educational Innovation

On Tuesday, February 27, 2007 Angela Sanbrano joined with the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to celebrate the LAUSD school board ratification of an historic agreement in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a network of ten autonomous small secondary schools—the Belmont Pilot Schools within the Belmont Zone of Choice (BZC). The milestone agreement, developed to complement the immense school construction underway in the Pico Union community, is the result of six years of discussion and negotiations between community, teachers and the LAUSD.

“This is a huge step forward for the entire Pico Union community,” said Cris Gutierrez, co-author of the BZC and Teacher-Scholar/Principal of Civitas SOL (School of Leadership), one of ten Pilot schools scheduled to open in September 2007. “We are putting into place one of the most ground breaking and comprehensive plans to redesign schools for a 21st century culture of learning in Pico Union where every young person can succeed.”

“This agreement demonstrates that we are not just talking about ideas, we are implementing innovative reform,” said LAUSD Superintendent of Schools David L. Brewer III.

The BZC is an in-district innovation plan that will create a portfolio of school choices for central-city students currently within the Belmont High School attendance area. The initiative includes Pilot small schools with no more than 450 students as models of educational excellence that foster widespread educational reform throughout the LAUSD.

“The Belmont Zone of Choice embodies the type of leadership, determination, and visionary spirit that the Pico Union community has long

been advocating for,” said LAUSD School Board member Monica Garcia whose district serves the Pico Union community. “We all know that the schools that work are ones that engage all stakeholders. The Belmont Education Collaborative will work closely with school administrators, teachers, the district, students, parents, business and all community partners who are concerned with the educational outcomes in this community,” added Garcia.

“We developed a monumental instructional plan to match the district’s monumental school construction program,” stated Veronica Melvin, Executive Director of the Alliance for a Better Community. The BZC was initiated by LAUSD Local District 4 Superintendent Richard Alonzo in conjunction with the Belmont Education Collaborative (BEC)—a group of more than 25 local organizations working in partnership with schools, parents and civic leaders to ensure that the new schools being constructed would offer a 21st education. “We want students to attend a school based on which programmatic theme most appeals to them, such as performing arts, health or technology, with all of the schools offering the highest quality of education that prepares students for an array of post-secondary options,” added Melvin.

The BZC and its Plot Schools represent a comprehensive model of transformation. The ten pilot schools will open over the next three to five years. Each school will have a wide autonomy in areas such as staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance, professional development and school schedules and calendars. Each small school will be based on a college preparatory curriculum that UC and CSU universities require for acceptance (A-G requirements), career based learning, meaningful parent engagement, and community partnerships.

For more information, call Marvin Andrade, Director of Education, at (213) 385-7800, ext 135.

Immigration Reform Efforts Coordinated for Maximum Impact on Congress

Local and national efforts are underway in order to propel immigration reform that takes into account the causes of migration and protects the safety and rights of workers.

Currently, 170 voters and community members have joined the CARECEN “*Familias Unidas*” (family circles) immigration reform campaign. The family circles attend “how to” workshops and coordinate informational community forums. They have organized support groups in seven congressional districts (28th, 31st, and 33rd through 39th). They have visited congress people Xavier Becerra, Howard Berman, Hilda Solis, Henry Waxman and Grace Napolitano to discuss rational and fair immigration reform.

Concurrently, a nationally endorsed set of principles and guidelines has been created by leading immigrant, immigration lawyers, community organizations and hometown associations in Los Angeles, Phoenix and San Antonio. Entitled the Unity Blueprint, specific recommendations call for repeal of onerous legislation and creation of new legislation.

The seven overarching principles of the Unity Blueprint are:

1. Protecting the well-being and safety of innocent immigrant and U.S. citizen children
2. Achieving maximum compliance with and faithful enforcement of immigration laws by reinstating the jurisdiction of the federal courts to review agency decisions involving immigrants.
3. Achieving maximum protection of the labor rights and working conditions of U.S. and immigrant workers.
4. Achieving maximum reduction in the size of the undocumented population.
5. Achieving a realistic legal framework for future immigration.
6. Achieving rational and humane operational control of the borders.
7. Achieving rational and humane interior enforcement and due process policies.

Having a Choice Program Makes a Difference for Students On Edge

Olivia was told that she would have to attend the Choice program during her regular eighth-grade English class period. She felt punished, picked on and set-up for failure, even though she had five “Fs” in English so far and was thrilled to be out of any class!

Imagine her surprise when she discovered that the four-week Choice program was actually fun, informative and helped her understand some of her problems in the English class. It even made her think she might be able to go on to high school, and maybe even college.

CARECEN Academic and Cultural Enrichment Coordinator, Mireya Garcia, developed the Choice program in response to the LAUSD reports that show that 72% of ninth graders drop out between ninth and tenth grade! In essence, only 16,520 students of the 59,000 incoming freshmen make it past tenth grade.

The Choice High School Preparation course was designed to help eighth graders successfully transition into high school. The program presents a curriculum based on self assessment, developing goals, managing time, peer pressure and choosing the right high school classes. It has produced amazing results in just one month.

Setting up a four-year schedule is key for students who rarely see a Guidance Counselor (the ratio of Guidance Counselors to students in California is 1 to 1,092). Most students have no idea of how to structure their four years of high school and in many



Mireya Garcia explains A-G classes to eighth grade students at Berendo Middle School in order for them to be able to create a four-year high school schedule.

cases, do not have a clue about what the courses might entail. For instance, how is World History different than Social Studies. They need to have these answers in order to assure that they will graduate, much less meet college entrance requirements.

Two sessions of the Choice program assist in building the high school schedule. In the process, youth begin to understand how ESL intersession and/or Saturday school math classes can make a huge difference in making it possible to graduate in 2012.

In addition, the Choice program allows students to ask questions about fears of high school, find clarity on the difference between and among classes, and understand how having a high school diploma can make a real difference in their lives.

They also are informed that CARECEN offers high school level tutoring and they are invited to receive assistance throughout their high school years. A number of students are now taking advantage of the after school homework assistance center.

“I am so inspired by them”, says Mireya Garcia, Education and Cultural Enrichment Coordinator at CARECEN. “I am so amazed at their motivation and potential to prosper.”

In fact, according to Emily Hernandez, Diploma Project Advisor at Berendo Middle School, of the students who attended the Choice program, 58% reduced the number of failing grades in their regular school work and 22 students went from having 3 Fs to none while in the short six-week program.

The CARECEN Academic and Cultural Enrichment Program is supported by grants from the Annenberg, Eisner, Parsons and Weingart Foundations.



“I am surprised at myself”, Olivia explains as she works on her homework at CARECEN’s after school homework and tutoring program. “Now I want to keep up my grades, so I come here for tutoring and I also help others with their work.”