

AFSC Central Region Colorado Stories, Spring 2008

Some Assembly Required

*By Jessi Quizar, Youth and Militarism Organizer, Colorado Area Office
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Larry, a 15-year-old student at North High School, came to us through his parole officer to do community service hours. On his first day in the office, we had a site visit from a funder, so I set him up at my computer to paste labels and watch some of our small library of DVDs so he would know a bit more about what the program does.

I came back from the site visit to find that Larry had made his way through three DVDs and wanted to talk. “It’s just so messed up!” he exclaimed. “No one I know knows this stuff and a lot of people just sign up for the military without knowing how it works at all!” We talked about how things are at his school and I asked if, for his community service hours, he would like to make a presentation about truth in recruitment to his social studies class.

He thought about it and said, “Well, I could. But everyone needs to know about this. I think we should do an assembly.” We talked about how assemblies get arranged at his school and identified two teachers for him to talk to. Voilà! Suddenly what had been just about community service hours turned into helping a student think about how to begin student organizing!

A Glimpse of the Beloved Community

*By Sarah Gill, Colorado Area Program Coordinator
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I recently did a presentation at a youth detention center, a locked facility, with our fabulous new volunteer, Theo. The first half was the standard “counter-recruitment” part—what you should know before you enlist. It was the first time I’d used a particular DVD produced by the national office, and it was interesting to see how well it held the attention of the students. Theo *really* held their attention as he talked about his father and how his PTSD from Vietnam affected the family, and how, nevertheless, Theo’s brother had signed up to go to Iraq when he couldn’t find a way out of his neighborhood.

The second half of the presentation was about “other options.” Theo had suggested that we base that section on chapter five in our new alternatives guide, which encourages young people to think about what they enjoy doing and what they’re good at as a way of identifying potential jobs or careers. When we posed the question “So what are you good at,” one student replied, “Fighting.” I don’t know if he was just being honest—whether he’d just always been told he wasn’t good at anything, but he knew he could do that one thing—or if he was being cheeky.

But I replied as if he was being serious. I told him about my personal boxing trainer, who used to be mostly a street fighter, in and out of trouble, before he found his way to martial arts and personal training. I said I'd arrange an interview with my trainer if the student called me when he got out. Same for the student who likes to cook—I promised an interview with a chef friend. And the same for the one who wants to be a massage therapist....

It all happened on the fly, and I don't know if the students will actually call. But for me, and I hope for them, it was nice to spend time in a space of imagining what we CAN do, of imagining possibility, and seeing how I can put my personal and professional networks to work in support of young people. It was a glimpse in the direction of the beloved community.

Allies Continue Push for Immigrant Rights in Colorado...

*By Jordan Garcia and Danielle Short, AFSC Colorado Human Rights Program
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Jordan connected with and trained on organizing Eritrean Youth, some who identify as immigrants and some as African Americans. One youth (age 19) emailed: "The most important and valuable portion of the seminar was when one of the presenters explained to us how we can come out as winners in a struggle. He spoke about how we need to know our targets, personal information about them, and how to pressure them into supporting our cause.

"The presenter even gave us an example on how he gained the support of Senator Salazar in his struggle for the rights of immigrants. This seminar motivated me to do something for my country. For once in my lifetime I do not feel helpless when it comes to helping Eritrea and I have to thank the presenters for that. I gained knowledge and confidence that will last me a lifetime. I really want to thank the presenters and people who are responsible for creating such a great event!"

So far there have been 18 bills related to immigration introduced at the Colorado state legislature. Anti-immigrant sentiment is not new at the Capitol; however, the statewide immigrant rights movement has never been so poised to stand up to these bills and work to shift the dialogue. AFSC's leadership in strengthening the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition was important in bringing CIRC to a position of hiring our first ever Public Policy Coordinator and monitoring lobbyist this January and developing a legislative strategy that set the baseline for a coordinated effort to defeat a majority of the anti-immigrant state legislation.

AFSC staff and Coloradoans for Immigrant Rights (CFIR) members have been playing a central role in the day-to-day activities needed to influence state legislation. This has included AFSC staff co-chairing the policy committee and creating and disseminating timely action alerts and legislative updates; CFIR members and staff meeting with key legislators and giving moving testimony at hearings. CFIR members have been putting into practice skills they have learned and honed in CFIR. Learning from and building on the experiences and relationships developed this year, next year the goal is to try to not only react to stop bad legislation, but be in a position to move pro-immigrant legislation.