

## **AFSC Central Region Immigration Stories, Fall 2007**

### **Allies for Immigrant Rights**

*By Danielle Short and Jordan Garcia, AFSC Colorado*

[DShort@afsc.org](mailto:DShort@afsc.org), [JGarcia@afsc.org](mailto:JGarcia@afsc.org)

AFSC's Coloradoans for Immigrant Rights (CFIR) members traveled to Greeley, Colorado for an event sponsored by anti-immigrant groups and the District Attorney, Ken Buck. The following is a quotation from one of the non-immigrant allies: "We spoke with the officials afterwards. The DA turned his back on [two immigrants] mid-sentence, but made time for me (so WRONG) during which I told him that I was really offended that he walked away from them and that I think they had a good point (it was about the gang pictures) and reiterated their point."

This member then went on to report that after speaking at great length with DA Ken Buck, she touched base with the two immigrants, both members of immigrant-led organizing partner organizations. Both were angered by the situation, but incredibly thankful to have the voice of an ally they could trust nearby. They expressed trust in the ally's perspective based on her working relationship and on her membership in CFIR.

The following is an email from one of the immigrant's partner, an eloquent immigrant activist, also present at the troubling event:

Mi querida and all,  
i was very grateful that you were there and YES you did call them out.  
It reminded me so much of that infamous Tancredo forum two years ago where our very strong Gabrielita took them all while I was crying in the audience. What can we say? tomorrow it will be business as usual for most of them, while we pick up the pieces and try to become stronger after "events" like this.  
gracias a todos

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### **Pressuring Social Security to Play Fair**

*By Gabriela Flora, Project Voice Regional Organizer*

[GFlora@afsc.org](mailto:GFlora@afsc.org)

AFSC has been part of a national effort to put pressure on the Social Security Administration (SSA) not to implement a new Department of Homeland Security no-match rule in a manner that would have a negative impact on millions of workers, immigrant and non-immigrant, throughout the country. Denver is home to one of SSA's 10 regional offices.

Shortly after the new rule was announced, AFSC, as a member of the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, contacted the SSA regional office in Denver to set up an appointment to meet with the regional commissioner. We wanted to share our concerns and ask them not send letters to employer, only to employees. This led to several constructive conversations with SSA staff and SSA sending us the letter with the new rule they planned to send out (which we shared with groups across the country so we could all know exactly what employers would be receiving).

But in the end SSA was unwilling to schedule a meeting. Thus, we decided to hand deliver the letter AFSC CO had circulated to groups across the state that over 22 organizations from 6 towns signed on to. The Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) coordinated the press release. AFSC and CIRC coordinated the delegation of five organizations that signed on to the letter. When we arrived to deliver the letter they refused to meet with us and instructed us via phone to leave the letter with security. Ch. 7, Ch. 2 and Univision showed up at the event with cameras and interviewed the delegation, along with an AP reporter. AFSC had live interviews on Spanish language radio Buena Onda (one before and one after) and with CNN Spanish radio and the AP story where Gabriela was quoted was covered by Ch. 4  
[http://cbs4denver.com/politics/local\\_story\\_263085536.html](http://cbs4denver.com/politics/local_story_263085536.html).

We followed up by sending a hand-written note along with another copy of the letter, expressing our disappointment in the failed meeting and our concern about the no-match matter. We also sent copies of the original letter to our CO delegation, majority and minority leaders in the CO assembly and the governor. Within three hours of leaving the SSA office, the Department of Homeland Security called AFSC's office in response to our attempt to meet with the commissioner, so our message was heard and we will continue to keep the pressure on.

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### **Standing Up for Immigrants,**

*By Sandra Sanchez, AFSC Iowa*

[SSanchez@afsc.org](mailto:SSanchez@afsc.org)

Ann Naffier, AFSC Immigration Specialist, followed up on a significant case in which an immigrant woman reported abuse by the Social Security Administration in Des Moines. The woman had asked SSA to make a spelling correction on her son's SSN card (her son is a U.S. citizen). The SSA asked her for photo ID, and she showed them her Honduran passport. SSA then confiscated passport, refused to correct her son's SSN card because she lacked proper photo identification, and called Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to arrest her.

ICE could not respond at that time, and as far as we know, has not moved to deport her. ICE is in possession of the passport. With the assistance primarily of National Immigration Law Center (Jonathan Blazer and Marielena Hincapie), we were able to convince the SSA to issue the corrected SSN card for the son, issue an apology to the mother, and advise us that they had changed their policy and would no longer call ICE when a foreign national comes to their office.

A racial profiling case by the Iowa Highway Patrol over a traffic stop was documented at the request of a United for the Dignity and Safety of Immigrants board member (who was the victim). The strategy chosen was for her to get the court judge to read her story. However, the judge didn't allow her to read it and declined to accept her written testimony (in English) for later reading. Needless to say this woman felt further victimized! She has not decided if she wants to pursue the issue with another state entity. We have received more informal reports of abuses in this particular area, but no one else wants to document it yet.

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## **Our “Colectivo Flatlander” Training,**

*By Josefina Castillo, AFSC Austin*

[JCastillo@afsc.org](mailto:JCastillo@afsc.org)

I like to write about these trainings because they bring me closer to home. The reason for this is that they are held in Spanish and within a popular education framework. Language and context are very important for people coming from Latino communities to feel safe and at home.

We held our sixth two-day workshop at Alma de Mujer, a place that has been traditionally offered to organizations working for social change. It is located near Lake Travis in what is known in Texas as the Hill Country, so the surroundings are lush and green and the place is managed by the Indigenous Women’s Network. This time we met Antonio López, a wonderful cook who took very good care of us. He would do the blessing to start a good day in the traditional native way.

On Sunday we went out to the garden to greet the sun, while holding some fresh herbs. It was a very moving moment. The training focused on how to strategize after the immigration debate mainly in terms of framing our messages as immigrant leaders. We discussed and role played these messages through sociodramas, posters and radio talk shows. For example, we were careful to point out that messages such as “we are not terrorists” carry a negative connotation. We mainly worked with proactive ways to frame our messages. We also had our “Noche Cultural” where several participants showed their artistic skills, singing, dancing, playing the guitar and accordion or through poetry.



Colectivo Flatlander training participants came from three cities in Texas and from New Orleans, Tennessee, Western Massachusetts, and California.