

Reflections on the Importance of the Women's Support Group

This past March, women worker members of the Arizona Interfaith Alliance for Worker Justice formed two resource and support groups to address the unique issues faced by low wage female immigrant workers. Under the leadership of staff member and VISTA volunteer, Maria Alva, group members meet weekly to share experiences, knowledge, and resources with each other as they seek to address their own workplace and personal situations. Commonly reported challenges include discrimination in the workplace and depression stemming from a sense of powerlessness.

The women are clearly determined to move forward as they support each other. They also recognize the need to expand their knowledge base in terms of information, skill development, and support strategies. This second newsletter is dedicated to these courageous women.

As is true for women of every race, nationality, and class, the women workers of the Arizona Interfaith Alliance face gender specific obstacles in the workplace. They also experience the stress of working a "double shift": one paid shift outside the home, and one unpaid shift in the home. This second shift includes managing the family budget, socializing and educating the children, cooking, and cleaning the home. While culturally men are viewed as the head of the family, the women are ultimately considered responsible for the wellbeing of their families. In colonias along the Mexico-U.S. border, women's responsibility for their families has taken them out into the streets in protest as basic services and needs are unmet by an unresponsive government.

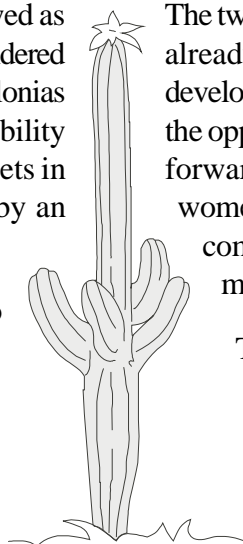
Women along the border are more likely to participate in local politics and organizing than their male counterparts. This is due to the reality that they cannot fulfill their roles as mothers and wives without first fighting for basic services such as water, electricity, or accessible bus routes.

Whereas in Mexico, women must deal with government officials and large corporations, immigrant families in Phoenix must confront employers whose seemingly unlawful behavior and business practices are supported by state legislation. While documented and undocumented workers alike have the same rights as any U.S. citizen, their access to recourse in the courts or through government agencies is blocked due to language barriers (facilitated by the English Only Law which passed in Arizona in 2006) and the fear generated by an anti-immigrant political climate that puts ordinary daily activity at risk. Employers take advantage of the culture of fear and lack of access to recourse by exploiting workers and denying them safe working conditions and standard pay.

As a result of this, women consistently report a sense of powerlessness to change their situation and a lack of control over their own lives. Weak legal worker protections and a very realistic fear of retaliation, make it impossible for women to confront their employers, which in turn impacts emotional and physical wellbeing. While male workers report the same feelings of powerless, women are uniquely challenged by gender violence both in terms of domestic violence and gender discrimination and workplace harassment. .

The two women's groups at the worker rights center have already begun to create space for dialogue, leadership development and personal change. The membership have the opportunity to take control over their lives and move forward. Functioning as a participatory democracy, women decide what they want to learn about, and what community resources and information are needed to move forward.

The hope of both membership and staff is that these groups facilitate the development of greater self



Womens Group Leader: Maria Alva

My name is Maria Alva. Throughout my life I have had many experiences. I have worked in hospitals, as a volunteer in elementary schools and in foster homes. I have also taken time to visit the elderly.

Currently, I am a Vista Volunteer at AIAWJ. Vista is a federal government program. During my Vista training we were given the opportunity to meet a diverse group of leaders, volunteers and program directors. This is how I became aware of the problems that exist in our communities and how we can combat these problems.

I have started two women's groups. Currently we discuss the problems that women face and how we can seek solutions to these problems. We welcome all women to come and join us as we seek out resources to help each person. To do

so we are putting together a list of organizations that will help us move forward such as English and Computer classes.

Many women have low self esteem when they join the group. That is why I like to share my experiences including what brought me here in the first place and everything that I have learned here. I like to share all of this with other people, especially the women that have had the same experiences.

I love it when people come to the center and find out about the resources we offer here at the center. That is why I would like to extend an invitation to everyone and that people can feel free to bring friends so we can seek out solutions together. Everyone is welcome and we will do whatever we can to help.

Large, diverse group marches to oppose 1070

The march on May 29th was a great example of a large and diverse group of people coming together against a regressive law that reflects an overall failure to implement a comprehensive immigration reform. It is important to note that the crowd did not only consist of "undocumented workers" or only "Mexicans." There were Anglos, African Americans, Asians, Natives, and Latinos. Young and old marched alongside one another; linking generations. There were lawyers, religious leaders, nurses, civil rights leaders, students, teachers, professors and blue collar workers. There were "documented" and "undocumented."

This diverse group of people came from across the nation to take a stance against a repressive, reactionary law that will do nothing but harm our community, our state and our nation. In turn, this large mass of thousands of people took to the streets to have their voice heard.

We understand that many undocumented workers from our community were too scared to come to the march. At times, it seems like too much of a risk to their families. However, the marchers sent a message to all of the undocumented people living in the shadows of Arizona and across the country; that there are thousands, millions of people that understand



SB1070 is hateful and regressive and that we need to implement a comprehensive immigration reform. They marched in order to voice their discontent and also to give a voice to those of you who perhaps were too scared to attend.

The march was peaceful, informative and eye opening to the amount of opposition to SB 1070. We urge those that did

Continued on page 4

Women's Group Member: Maria M

I am very stressed at my job because one always runs the risk of being fired if you do not do exactly what your boss says or they treat you badly or ignore you because you are a woman or an immigrant. The truth is that I have been discriminated against at my job. That is why I joined the women's group. I want to move forward as a person and learn whatever I can in order to first help my family and if possible other people as well.



I have learned a lot in the women's group. I have learned that anything is possible with a little bit of help and identifying people and resources that are willing to help. I would say to women that are having problems at work that any problem

also has a solution. However, you have to talk about these problems and you can't be scared of anything or anyone. There is always someone that can help you. I would like to say welcome to our group and the workers center because we can provide help here.

One year from now I would like to see more women participating in the women's group. Also, one day, I would like to work together with Maria. I would like to help her organize the women that come in. In the future I would also like to see a more diverse set of presentations and services that we can offer. That is, I would like to work on certain issues that really affect our community. For example, resources that deal with health issues, how to help depressed women, English classes, and computer classes.

Enough! Worker of the Month: Raul B.

I went to work for a tile company last year, putting tile in a condominium. I finished the job in early August. During this time the contractor "Victor" told me that that they would pay me on the 15th. So I waited until the 15th and when I called Victor he told me to call later. However, he did not keep his promise and he did not pay me and he stopped answering my phone calls. I didn't do anything until a friend told me about the workers rights center. I arrived at the center with essentially no evidence because the only thing I had was a paper that had the square footage of the work I had done and the address of the jobsite. Cristina, a labor rights promoter at the center, and the other workers were very happy to help me out. The process of my claim included the tile company sending me documents and I would bring

these papers to the center. Cristina would help me interpret these documents and respond to them. I never lost hope that I would recover my wages. I want to say to all workers, women and men that you shouldn't sit around and not take action. Don't worry about the process to resolve the matter because my day arrived when I won my case and your day will arrive as well. Certain cases take longer than others but thanks to God everything that is just will be resolved and the truth will always come to light. I want to say thank you to the worker rights center for everything they did to help me and all the workers of Arizona.



Importance of the Women's Support Group

Continued from page 1

esteem, personal potential and leadership skills which will, in turn, be shared with a new generation of women workers

coming to the center. We believe that when women have a safe space where they can speak openly about their lives, those lives will be transformed as well as the communities in which they live.

Calendario de Eventos:

June 7- Workers Rights Training at 6 p. m.

June 14- Workers committee meeting; we eat at 5:30 and the meeting begins at 6 p.m.

June 14- Our summer intern Will Rutt arrives.

June 28- Worker Rights Training, 6 p.m.

To be confirmed/announced—meetings and protests around SB 1070.

July 8- Board meeting.

July 12- Workers Rights Training 6 p.m.

July 14- Board meeting 5:30 p.m.

July 26- Workers Rights Training 6 p.m.

July 29- A Day of Action against SB 1070 TBA.

Large, diverse group marches to oppose 1070

Continued from page 2

not attend to analyze the risks and benefits of attending such events. It is safe to say that we have seen Arizona slowly decline into more of a police state; into a climate of fear. If we do not stand up now, it will become worse and our friends, our children, and our neighbors will suffer from more severe legislation and laws. We must organize and work together; documented and undocumented, those with degrees and

those with no education, Anglo's, African American, Asians, Natives and Latinos; young and old.

The May 29th march sent a message. The question is, are you willing to work together with the tens of thousands that marched on Saturday? Are you willing to participate in a summer of organizing and peaceful struggle? Are you willing to make Arizona a safer place for your friends and family? The worker rights center is ready to organize. Are you?

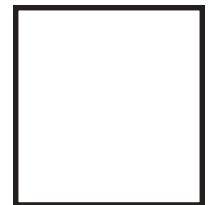


331 E. Willetta
Phoenix, AZ

P.O. Box 28055
Phoenix, AZ 85010

602-254-5452

www.azworkerjustice.com



Remember! The AIAWJ freedom summer will begin on June 14 with arrival of intern Will Rutt. Call the center or staff about participating in a "Summer of Action."