



# Immigrant Workers Empowerment and Community Building:

A Review of Issues and  
Strategies for Increasing  
Workforce and Economic  
Opportunity for Immigrant  
Workers

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By

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Photo of Mayfair, OEPA, and CJTC Staff and leaders on site visit to Chicago.

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## Executive Summary

Immigrants face multiple obstacles to finding and keeping decent employment in the U.S. economy. Many have limited English abilities, lower levels of education, and insecure immigration status. Even when documentation is not a major issue, they may be subject to discrimination and exploitation in the workplace. Government services, workforce development and education systems often do not effectively respond to the needs of these immigrants, partly because of the challenges of legal status and partly because of issues of cultural competency and a general lack of knowledge of the special needs of immigrant populations.

These gaps in knowledge and service provision can present obstacles to successful community revitalization. Poor neighborhoods often have a high immigrant presence and failure to incorporate these new arrivals is an opportunity lost. These immigrants can bring a high level of attachment to work, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a willingness to engage in community building processes. Workforce development efforts that do not include attention to immigrant workers are also likely to fall short in their connection to community development. At the same time, including immigrants is not a simple task: organizations devoted to improving the economic circumstances of poorer neighborhoods must confront the typical challenges facing *all* community development organizations, and tackle the added barriers that immigrants face in the labor market, including navigating the challenges undocumented workers face in the workplace and the obstacles all immigrants face in securing a voice in the policy-making process.

The Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community has been working with two Bay Area Neighborhood Improvement Initiatives (NIIs), the Mayfair Improvement Initiative (MII) in East San Jose and One East Palo Alto (OEPA), in East Palo Alto, to help each organization develop effective programming for immigrant workers in their neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods have high concentrations of immigrant workers, many of whom face limited employment prospects.<sup>1</sup> Both communities also seem to have a high presence of working poverty as evidenced by the significant shares of their populations hovering between 100% and 200% of the poverty rate. Workforce development efforts that effectively target these workers could have a significant impact on neighborhood earnings and community development.

As part of the CJTC efforts with Mayfair and East Palo Alto, we helped organize an October 2003 symposium, *From Shadows to Strategies*, that looked at workforce development efforts for immigrants. In 2004, we worked closely with MII and OEPA to facilitate visits of NII leaders to cutting-edge community efforts, including day labor organizations and immigrant education and advocacy centers in both San Francisco and Chicago. We have complemented these direct learning experiences with a research effort looking at innovative practices around the country, all in the hopes of better informing MII and OEPA strategies for community empowerment.

In this research brief, we report on that effort, profiling eight organizations who have had success working with an immigrant worker population, generally in the context of broader efforts for community and policy change. This is not a comprehensive examination of practices around the country – but our eight cases, selected from a broader pool in consultation with experts and

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information on the Mayfair neighborhood see Empowerment Research, a Program of the Community Development Institute, *The Mayfair Improvement Initiative Worker Survey*, November 2004.

community advocates, are drawn from five states with large and increasing immigrant communities. As a result, they may offer important lessons for the two NIIs. The organizations profiled are:<sup>2</sup>

- Chicago Day Laborer Collaborative, IL
- Strengthen Our Agribusiness Region (SOAR), CA  
A project of the Farmworker Institute for Education and Leadership Development (FIELD)
- Garment Workers Center, CA
- Near Northside Partners Council, TX
- Primavera Works, AZ
- Restaurant Opportunities Center-New York City
- Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES), CA
- The Workplace Project, NY

Our research found that immigrant worker programs and strategies generally fall into four broad categories:

- *Service Provision:* This includes provision either through the organization or through partners, with services ranging from education and training, such as GED and ESL courses, computer classes, and vocational training, to direct services such as job placement, food assistance, daycare, or legal services.
- *Enterprise Development:* This includes efforts to build on entrepreneurial spirit, including the direct operation of firms, technical and financial assistance to start-ups, new legal forms for enterprises, and sectoral approaches to business development in industries where immigrants can gain a foothold.
- *Advocacy:* This includes broader efforts for policy that can disproportionately impact immigrants, including improving workplace rights, access to social services, workforce development, and healthcare, and more direct advocacy for immigrant rights and improved immigration policy.
- *Community Organizing:* This includes base-level work to improve community voice, including worker organizing, neighborhood organizing, and ethnic specific organizing, often with significant efforts at popular education and leadership development.

These activities are similar to strategies pursued by a wide range of other immigrant organizations around the country. What is especially valuable in the approach of the organizations we reviewed is these strategies are overlapping and integrated in order to promote larger change in the conditions immigrant workers face, rather than focusing solely on providing necessary services. That is, services and enterprise promotion are seen as part of a larger effort to empower immigrants and their communities, and so advocacy and organizing are integral parts of this process.

Despite their successes, the organizations we interviewed all experienced and overcame organizational challenges in providing the range of strategies necessary to address and meet the needs of immigrant workers and create viable employment opportunities. These include:

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that their contact information is located in the appendices of the report.

- *Challenges and Opportunities of Being a Direct Service Provider:* Service provision takes technical skills, staff time, and financial resources, and it can sometimes take away from broader organizing for systems change. At the same time, services are necessary and can help organizations gain credibility and audience. Maintaining a balance is difficult but necessary and some organizations do this through partnering.
- *Challenges and Opportunities of Business Development Strategies:* Like service provision, business promotion can place a drain on organizations. However, enterprise development can have direct positive impacts on immigrant communities and organizations are increasingly considering sectoral strategies to upgrade industries with high numbers of immigrant workers, such as garments, so that pay standards can rise.
- *Challenges and Opportunities of Advocacy Campaigns:* While particular services can make a difference, broad policy changes are needed to improve immigrant lives and livelihoods. The policy arenas ripe for change run the gamut from amnesty provisions to healthcare but the single uniting factor is that change comes when communities can build power. Often this requires strategic analysis and coalition building, particularly at a regional scale.
- *Challenges and Opportunities of Community Organizing/ Building:* In order to build local power, communities need to discover their identity and voice. Workforce and community development organizations, through the use of popular education techniques, can work towards building this voice by connecting worker experiences to common problems and leadership development programs.

MII and OEPA, like many other communities, face issues having to do with language barriers, low education levels, lack of documentation, discrimination and exploitation in the workplace, difficulty in accessing government services, and community vulnerability to ineffective labor laws and the spread of low-wage jobs. The organizations we profile are rising beyond the challenges noted above to combine ESL classes with popular education for worker advocacy, enterprise development with an effort to change financial and legal policy, and service provision with leadership development to tackle broader issues such as naturalization and immigrant access to government help.

MII and OEPA may have much to learn from the successes and obstacles of the cases profiled here. MII, for example, has stressed the importance of an Adult Learning Center; the research here suggests that such learning centers are even more effective when combined with popular education for advocacy and leadership development programs for continuing community voice. OEPA has explored the issue of day labor; the research profiled here suggests both ways in which day labor programs can be effective and the potential value of partnering with other organizations and communities in that effort. Finally, both NIIs have recognized the importance of multi-ethnic advocacy for policy change; the research demonstrates the power of such coalitions and cross-community understanding, particularly when seeking to improve policy and social receptivity towards immigrants.

Immigrants are drawn by the promise of America and they also help our nation fulfill that promise. Seeing immigrants as an asset is a first step to making that promise real – and community is often the first level for incorporating immigrants into the nation's life. MII and OEPA are to be

applauded for making immigrant incorporation a key part of their local development strategies and we hope that this document will spur further discussion and debate as they seek to realize the promise of America for everyone in their communities.



## Introduction

Foreign-born immigrants are a large and growing portion of the U.S. labor force, and they face serious challenges in finding and keeping good jobs with family sustaining wages. Currently accounting for 15 percent of all workers, immigrants are expected to account for half of the growth in the working age population between 2006 and 2015, and all of the net growth between 2016 and 2035 (Camarota 2004; GCIR 2001). Immigrants already fill many critical jobs, perform essential services, and constitute major portions of the workforce in a number of industries. Research has shown the important roles of immigrants as entrepreneurs, taxpayers and workers, and how the emergence of Silicon Valley as a technological center would have been impossible without their economic contribution.<sup>3</sup> Though immigrants work in all occupations and industries there is a concentration in low-wage jobs and a disproportionate number of low-wage families. Immigrants face multiple obstacles to finding and keeping decent employment in the U.S. economy. Many have insecure or undocumented immigration status, limited English abilities, and are subject to discrimination and exploitation in the workplace. Furthermore, government services, and the workforce development and education systems often do not effectively respond to the needs of immigrant workers.

Community organizations devoted to improving the economic circumstances of immigrants in this country thus face an enormous set of challenges. They must confront the typical challenges facing *all* community development organizations, such as declining and fickle funding sources, the deterioration of jobs and working conditions in the U.S. labor market, and the administrative, management and leadership challenges of building any successful organization. In addition to these conditions, they must work to address the added barriers that immigrants face in the labor market, including navigating the legal challenges of undocumented workers.

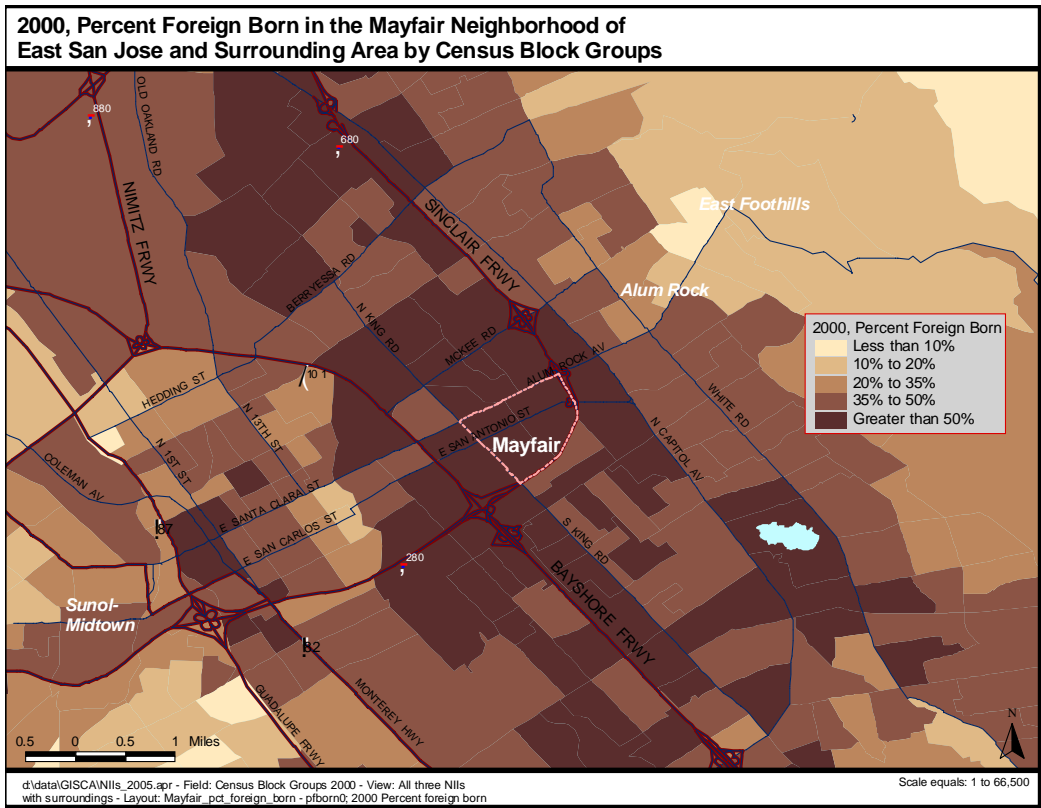
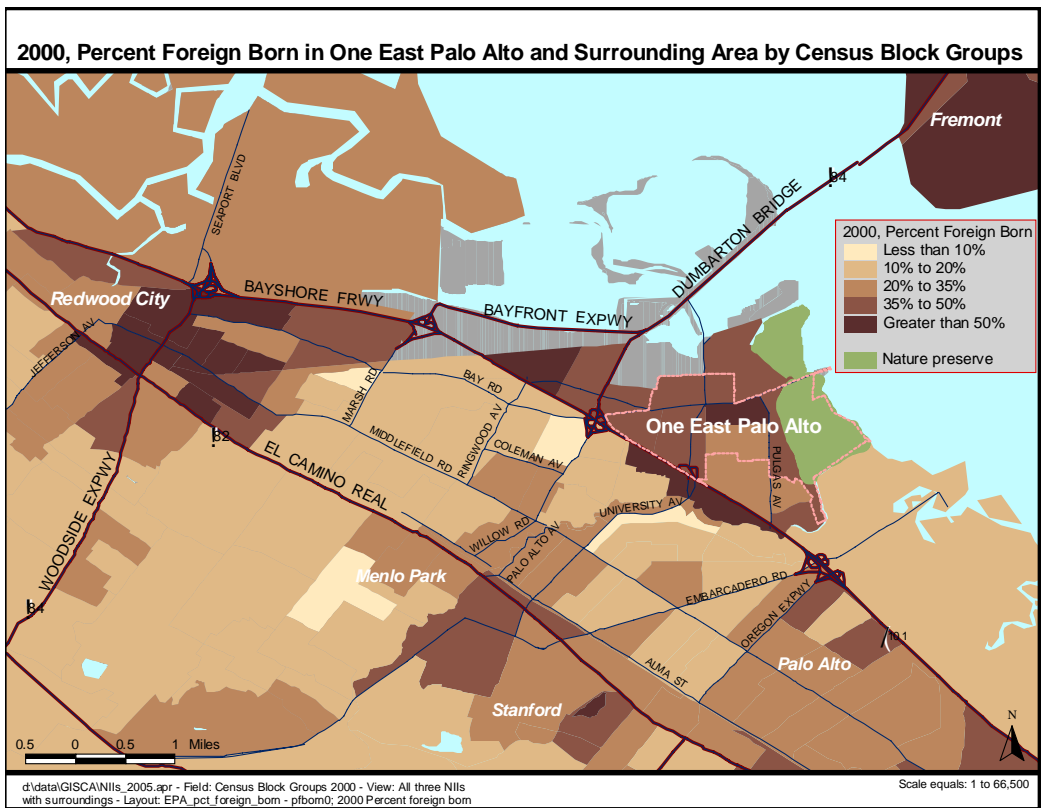
The Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community has been working with the Mayfair Neighborhood Improvement Initiative (MII) in East San Jose, and One East Palo Alto (OEPA) in East Palo Alto to help each organization develop effective programming for immigrant workers in their neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods have high concentrations of immigrant workers, who face poor employment prospects. In both neighborhoods, nearly 60% of the population 25 and older did not have a high school degree, and workers are over-represented in low-paying production, construction and service occupations (see Tables 1 and 2). Both also have a high presence of working poverty as evidenced by significant populations (23 percent in Mayfair and 27.4 percent in OEPA) hovering between 100% and 200% of the poverty rate, a band usually associated with working poverty (see Table 1).

In Mayfair, nearly 60% of the population that was counted in the 2000 census was foreign born, and half of those came in the 1990s, with the number likely to be significantly higher if all undocumented immigrants could be counted. In One East Palo Alto, 43% of the population was foreign-born in 2000, with 45% of arriving in the 1990s. Notice how the Mayfair neighborhood is surrounded by neighborhoods that are highly concentrated with immigrant families. In contrast, the neighborhoods adjacent to OEPA have fewer foreign born, with Redwood City as the next closest community to OEPA with a large percentage of foreign born. (see Maps below).

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<sup>3</sup> *The Economic Effects of Immigration*, Working Partnerships USA, September, 2004.





The neighborhoods' immigrant presence and working poverty suggests the need for special workforce development strategies. Both MII and OEPA have already made a strong commitment to programs to help immigrant workers get and keep good jobs, and have been considering a range of additional strategies to expand this work. In collaboration with the CJTC, an ongoing learning process has been underway for over a year. Starting in the fall of 2003 the CJTC worked with both sites to host a special symposium, *From Shadows to Strategies*:

*A Symposium on Undocumented Labor, Workforce Development, & Community Improvement.* In February, 2004 we continued with a site visit to the Raza Centro Legal in the Mission District of the Bay Area to further deepen the

understanding of the opportunities as well as challenges faced in organizing and program development with of immigrant and undocumented workers.

In July, 2004 representatives from both neighborhoods were part of a site visit to groups in the Chicago area who were doing similar work. Participants in the Chicago site visit heard how groups there learned that they must go beyond smart strategies to think about how to build power in the long run. They also confirmed some of the lessons they already knew, like relying on an organizing model that is based on people-to-people interaction and taking the time to tell people's stories to understand where people are coming from. This series of learning exchanges have informed MII's and OEPA's understanding of options for MII's Adult Learning Center and OEPA's evolving day labor strategies. In December 2004, MII and the Community Development Institute (CDI) implemented a worker survey in the neighborhood; the data collected showed among other findings, that the workers were

employed in low-wage jobs without benefits and were eager for job training and to learn English in order to improve their employment prospects. Issues like lack of technical skills including job

Table 1: Profile of Two Neighborhoods in County Context					
		Mayfair	Santa Clara County	One East Palo Alto	San Mateo County
Population		8,349	1,682,585	13,855	707,161
% Anglo		2.9%	44.0%	3.1%	49.7%
% Latino		79.8%	24.0%	61.6%	21.8%
% African American		1.8%	2.5%	25.1%	3.3%
% Asian Pacific Islander		13.6%	25.7%	7.9%	21.1%
% Other		2.0%	3.7%	2.3%	4.1%
Foreign-born		59.2%	34.1%	43.2%	32.3%
Non-citizen		42.2%	20.0%	34.1%	16.5%
Of Foreign-born:					
% entered in 1990s		50.2%	46.3%	44.8%	36.5%
% entered in 1980s		33.2%	29.8%	34.0%	29.5%
% entered earlier		16.6%	23.9%	21.2%	33.9%
% of Population:					
Living Below Poverty		16.8%	7.5%	16.2%	5.8%
>100 & <150% of Pov.		11.2%	5.0%	13.4%	4.8%
>150 & <200% of Pov.		11.8%	5.4%	14.0%	5.2%
Median Age of:					
Total Population		26.6	34.0	25.3	36.8
Latinos		24.7	32.3	21.8	27.3
Males Older than 25		2,342	556,676	3,538	236,459
% with < high school		61.9%	15.6%	57.8%	14.9%
% with B.A. or more		7.8%	44.4%	7.1%	40.9%
Females Older than 25		2,186	556,382	3,448	253,826
% with < high school		56.7%	17.6%	50.4%	14.6%
% with B.A. or more		9.2%	36.6%	9.9%	37.3%
Full-time workers as % of workers					
Males		61.0%	72.0%	63.2%	71.4%
Females		46.1%	56.6%	52.8%	57.8%

Source: U.S. Census 2000

searching skills, education levels, costs of classes and childcare were identified as obstacles to employment opportunities.

To provide the sites with examples of other successful programs and to place their work in a broader context of immigrant worker programs, we conducted a review of promising practices around the country of community organizations' efforts to provide workforce assistance to immigrants. Bay Area examples certainly provide excellent resources and models but were not

**Table 2: Workforce Composition of Two Neighborhoods in County Context**

	Mayfair	Santa Clara County	One East Palo Alto	San Mateo County
<b>Total male workers</b>	<b>1,858</b>	<b>478,364</b>	<b>2,765</b>	<b>195,469</b>
Management, professional, and related occupations:	11.4%	50.1%	11.9%	42.0%
Management, business, and financial operations occupations:	4.0%	18.7%	6.0%	19.9%
Professional and related occupations:	7.4%	31.4%	5.8%	22.0%
Computer and mathematical occupations	2.4%	11.6%	1.9%	7.1%
Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations:	0.2%	1.6%	0.2%	2.2%
Other	4.8%	18.2%	3.8%	12.8%
Service occupations:	23.1%	9.2%	34.2%	12.1%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	3.7%	3.2%	10.8%	4.2%
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	17.3%	3.4%	20.8%	4.0%
Personal care and service occupations	0.5%	0.8%	0.2%	1.2%
Other	1.7%	1.9%	2.4%	2.7%
Sales and office occupations:	15.3%	15.9%	13.6%	19.8%
Sales and related occupations	6.3%	9.2%	5.8%	11.2%
Office and administrative support occupations	9.0%	6.7%	7.8%	8.6%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0.9%	0.5%	1.0%	0.4%
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations:	19.2%	11.1%	19.2%	13.4%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations:	30.1%	13.2%	20.1%	12.4%
Production occupations	18.4%	8.5%	11.3%	5.3%
Transportation and material moving occupations:	11.8%	4.7%	8.8%	7.1%
	Mayfair	Santa Clara County	One East Palo Alto	San Mateo County
<b>Total female workers</b>	<b>1,161</b>	<b>365,548</b>	<b>2,338</b>	<b>166,171</b>
Management, professional, and related occupations:	20.0%	46.4%	18.7%	43.6%
Management, business, and financial operations occupations:	7.1%	18.5%	8.8%	19.0%
Professional and related occupations:	12.9%	28.0%	10.0%	24.6%
Computer and mathematical occupations	1.2%	5.2%	0.4%	2.9%
Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations:	4.2%	5.1%	2.9%	6.3%
Other	7.5%	17.7%	6.6%	15.4%
Service occupations:	24.4%	12.2%	38.0%	15.2%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	6.2%	3.4%	7.9%	3.6%
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	11.5%	2.1%	16.0%	3.3%
Personal care and service occupations	4.8%	4.1%	7.4%	4.8%
Other	1.8%	2.7%	6.7%	3.5%
Sales and office occupations:	26.2%	31.6%	32.5%	36.2%
Sales and related occupations	5.6%	10.1%	10.9%	11.4%
Office and administrative support occupations	20.6%	21.5%	21.7%	24.8%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	1.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations:	0.0%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations:	28.4%	8.6%	10.1%	4.2%
Production occupations	24.5%	7.5%	8.6%	3.0%
Transportation and material moving occupations:	3.9%	1.1%	1.5%	1.2%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3

heavily represented in this report.<sup>4</sup> Our goal was not just to identify promising practices, but to probe deeper into the tensions and tightropes organizations encountered in pursuing various strategies, the trade-offs they face in considering different organizational activities, and the organizational challenges they overcame in developing their particular set of activities. Though the case studies reflected the particularities of their local economic and political contexts, they also offer more general lessons on possible strategies to address key barriers and challenges facing immigrant workers. Issues such as language capacity, lack of access to governmental services, the barriers of documentation, low levels of education and skills, and structural discrimination and exploitation are among the challenges that community-based organizations help immigrant workers address in order to make a stable and sustainable living for themselves, their families and their communities.

We chose eight organizations to review in-depth. These organizations were selected following consultation with a range of community development professionals, organizers, activists, researchers, and policy makers around the country, as representing promising practices in the field. This study is not a comprehensive examination of practices around the country, focusing instead on cases in five states with large and increasing immigrant communities: California (three cases) as well as Illinois, New York (two cases), Texas, and Arizona to capture strategies in place outside of California. We do not claim that these organizations are necessarily best practices in the field, since much more research over a longer period of time would be necessary before making such a strong claim. Nonetheless, the strategies being pursued by these eight organizations are resulting in significant success, and we believe the lessons learned from their efforts are valuable not only for MII and OEPA, but for any community organization involved in helping immigrant workers.

The organizations we reviewed are the following (Refer to the appendices at the end of the document for more detailed descriptions including contact information):

- The **Chicago Area Workers' Center (CAWC)** was founded in 2000 in the primarily immigrant Latino community of Northwest Chicago, and has since expanded to work throughout the city of Chicago. CAWC focuses on organizing and empowering undocumented, primarily Spanish-speaking, low-wage workers, and emphasizes problems related to the rise in temporary employment and highly exploitive employment practices in the day laborer industry. They make extensive use of media exposure and creative organizing tactics to pressure for change in these employment practices. They also link the organizing work with leadership development, training in specific job skills, GED and ESL courses. As part of a growing set of immigrant labor organizations in Chicago, the CAWC has helped influence policy and practices in the growing temporary employment sector in the region.
- The **Garment Workers Center (GWC)** was opened in January 2001 in Los Angeles, as a collaboration of Sweatshop Watch, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Korean Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA) and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC). The establishment of the Center created the first organization focused on organizing and empowering garment workers in Los Angeles (less than 1 percent of garment workers in the area are part of a union). GWC's primary focus is on direct organizing

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<sup>4</sup>To learn more about Santa Clara County based information, see *Bridging Borders in Silicon Valley, Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions*, December 2000 at <http://www.immigrantinfo.org/borders/index.html>

To learn more about the Mayfair neighborhood, see Empowerment Research, a Program of the Community Development Institute, *The Mayfair Improvement Initiative Worker Survey*, November 2004.

and leadership development, focusing on assisting workers in claims around wage and labor law violations, and providing education around their rights in the workplace. They use advocacy and coalition-building strategies as a way to link worker members to a broader set of strategies focused on immigrant workers' rights. With recent changes in global trade policy and the imminent decline of garment manufacturing in the U.S., the Center is also now exploring enterprise development strategies as a way of linking worker members with specific growing sectors and occupations in the regional economy.

- The **Farmworker Institute for Education and Leadership Development (FIELD)** was originally established by United Farm Worker leader Cesar Chavez in the 1970s. It received new life in 1999 with financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor, and has subsequently become the convener and coordinator of SOAR (Strengthen Our Agribusiness Region) which has brought together employers, educational institutions, service providers, training providers, elected officials, and workers throughout the San Joaquin Valley to collaborate on having a healthier, more stable, productive workforce.
- **Near Northside Partners Council in Ft. Worth, Texas** was founded in 1991, as a resident-led organization working in a clearly defined Latino neighborhood in the Ft. Worth area. Starting with advocacy around improving health services for immigrants in the education system, they subsequently broadened their efforts to a comprehensive community development approach. While their initial vision was to focus exclusively on advocacy and organizing, they have adopted service provision responsibilities (partially in partnership with other organizations) at the request of the community. Services include workforce development training, GED/ESL courses, family planning and substance abuse counseling, financial literacy and income tax services.
- **Primavera Works** is a temporary help agency and day labor site affiliated with the Primavera Foundation in Tucson, Arizona. It was founded in 1996 to help place workers residing in Primavera homeless shelters. The decision to establish the agency came after years of pursuing advocacy-oriented measures to address the complaints of residents about the day labor industry in Tucson. Starting with short-term placements in public contracts, the organization has expanded to include more than 50 private-sector businesses who hire temporary workers through Primavera, primarily in construction, janitorial, light manufacturing, data entry, landscaping and groundskeeping. The overall goal of the initiative is to improve the temporary and day laborer labor market in the region, by providing real access to jobs for people in need, while pressuring other agencies in the region to improve their practices by providing a 'high-road' competitor that will draw more of the available labor pool.
- **Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC-NY) in New York City** is an industry-specific worker center founded to support the 200 mostly immigrant survivors that became unemployed when the upscale Windows on the World restaurant collapsed with the World Trade Center in 2001. The loss of jobs as well as the post-9-11 crisis in the tourism and restaurant industry created a severe need for services, which ROC-NY helped fill. ROC deploys a two-tiered strategy that aims to reform the restaurant industry in New York City: as they work to empower workers at the grassroots level, they are also busily constructing the first cooperatively-owned restaurant in Manhattan. Ownership of a successful tablecloth restaurant promises to establish ROC's voice at the entrepreneurial table and, simultaneously, helps illustrate the feasibility of paying fair wages, providing benefits, and turning a profit. In this way, ROC-NY has moved

from service provision to building the leverage necessary to influence and direct the NY restaurant industry as a whole.

- **Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES)** founded in 1994 in the San Francisco Bay Area promotes cooperative business ownership by immigrant, and other low income women, as a way of promoting their economic independence and social well-being. After two years of organizing and assisting women to identify possible businesses, they decided to focus on environmentally-sound house cleaning businesses. With three cooperatives now operating in three different cities, the women who are workerowners, who previously had been in low-paid, insecure, isolated, and unhealthy jobs, are now in a safe environment, where they have educational opportunities and participate in the decision making. WAGES programmatic areas include general education, governance and management training, and technical assistance, primarily around legal structures, tax preparation, conflict resolution, evaluation, and strategic planning.
- **The Workplace Project** originally formed as a legal assistance project of CARECEN-NY (Central American Refugee Center) an immigrant rights organization in Long Island, New York. After two years of focusing on issues such as unpaid wages, injuries on the job, and discrimination, Workplace Project staff turned their attention to linking services to leadership development and advocacy strategies. Currently the Workplace Project runs a workers' rights education course, which is required for immigrants to take before they can access legal assistance, and is linked this with popular education materials as well. They have also developed several centers for day laborers, and helped advocate in a highly charged context.

These cases represent a range of strategies that illustrate certain successes in meeting the needs of immigrant workers to gain access and job security. They also demonstrate leadership development and increasing participation by immigrant workers in the policy and workplace decisions that directly affect them. While their strategies often reflect the localized economic and political contexts, their work can also be seen in a broader context of global and national market and policy shifts.

The report begins with a brief review of current conditions immigrants experience in the U.S. labor market, and the multiple barriers they face in finding and keeping decent employment. We then present key strategies used by community and worker-based organizations to address these barriers. We ground these strategies in terms of the organizational capacity and identify lessons that illustrate the organizational challenges and tensions that the case study organizations faced in developing their various programs. The final section provides some concluding comments for informing the NII workforce development programs for immigrant residents.

## **I. The Context: Immigrants and Economic Opportunity**

First generation immigrants are growing in absolute numbers and playing an increasingly important role in the U.S. economy and society. In the 1990s, they accounted for more than 50% of the growth in the workforce, up from only 10% on the 1970s, and immigrants are expected to account for all new growth in the workforce within two decades. Yet currently, they are concentrated in low-wage jobs, and face substantial barriers to improving their economic circumstances.

## *Immigrants and Economic Opportunity*

According to a recent study of immigration trends by the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington DC (Camarota 2004):

- As of March 2004, there were an estimated 34 million immigrants in the country, the highest number ever recorded in U.S. history. This number is approximately 4.3 million higher than in 2000.
- Of this total, an estimated 10 million (almost 30%) currently lack appropriate documentation.
- Almost half of the 4.3 million increase between 2000 and 2004 are undocumented immigrants.
- Mexican immigrants account for an estimated 31 percent of all immigrants in the country, and an estimated 60 to 70 percent of undocumented immigrants.

Though immigration to the U.S. is linked in part with people's efforts to improve their economic circumstances, it is important to remember that immigration is driven by a complex set of personal, family, social, political and economic factors, and is not directly tied to job growth, at least not in any simple way. For instance, between 2000 and 2004, a period in which overall job creation was stagnant in the U.S. and the unemployment levels of immigrants increased, the level of new immigration was actually higher than the previous four year period, a time of sustained job growth in the U.S. Immigrants work in all industries and occupations, but are disproportionately represented in certain occupations.

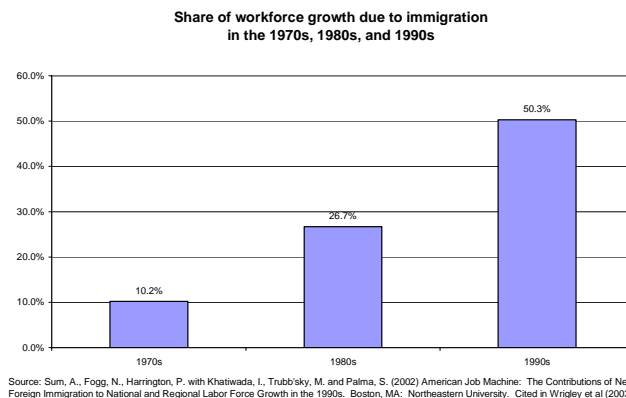




Table 3 shows both the share of immigrants working in particular occupational groupings, and the share of that occupation that are comprised of immigrants. More than one in 10 (11%) of all immigrant workers in the U.S. are employed in production manufacturing

jobs, such as in the garment and food processing industries, with large shares of immigrant workers also engaged in construction & extraction (10%), sales (9%), and office and administrative support (9%) occupations.

Immigrants make up 36% of all people employed in farming, fishing & forestry occupations, and 35% of people employed in building cleaning and maintenance occupations. Other occupations in which at least 20% of the jobs are filled with immigrants also include food preparation (23%), and production manufacturing (22%).

On average, immigrants earn significantly less than native workers. As shown in Table 4, immigrant women in 2002 earned an average of only \$26,700, 89% of what native women earn. Immigrant men earned an average of \$29,700, only 80% of what U.S.-born workers earned. Nearly half of all immigrants earn an hourly wages less than 200% of the minimum wage, while approximately 10% actually earn less than the minimum wage. In 2002, immigrants made up 20% of low-wage workers, despite being only 14% of the workforce and only 11% of all U.S. residents. While the low-wage native labor force is mainly female at 59 percent, men dominate the low-wage immigrant labor force at 56 percent (Capps et al. 2003).

<b>Table 3: Occupational Composition of U.S. Immigrant Workforce</b>		
Occupational Group	Share of All Immigrants Who Work in Occupation	Share of Occupation Comprised of Immigrants
Production manufacturing	11%	22%
Construction & Extraction	10%	24%
Sales	9%	12%
Office & admin. Support	9%	10%
Building cleaning and maintenance	8%	35%
Food Preparation	8%	23%
Transportation & moving	7%	16%
Management	7%	10%
Healthcare practitioner	4%	12%
Computer mathematical	3%	19%
Personal care & service	3%	16%
Installation and repair	3%	13%
Business and financial	3%	10%
Education, training	3%	8%
Farming, fishing & Forestry	2%	36%
Healthcare support	2%	17%
Architecture & engineering	2%	15%
Life, physical & soc. Science	1%	18%
Arts, entertainment & media	1%	11%
Community & social service	1%	9%
Protective service	1%	8%
<u>Legal Occupations</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>7%</u>
Total, all occupations	100%	15%
Source: Adapted from Camarota, Steven. 2004. "A Jobless Recovery? Immigrant Gains and Native Losses." Washington DC: Center for Immigration Studies. Based on U.S. Census, CPS data		

<b>Table 4: Wage levels and Income of Workers, by Nativity and Sex, 2002</b>				
Wage Level	<u>Foreign Born Workers</u>		<u>Native Workers</u>	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Less than minimum wage	13%	9%	9%	6%
100-200% of minimum wage	40%	36%	31%	20%
>200% of minimum wage	47%	55%	61%	75%
Mean Annual Earnings	\$26,700	\$38,400	\$29,700	\$47,500
Source: Capps, Randy, Michael Fix, Jeffrey S. Passel, Jason Ost and Dan Perez-Lopez. 2003. "A Profile of the Low-Wage Immigrant Workforce." Washington DC: Urban Institute.				

## *Challenges Facing Immigrant Workers*

The concentration of immigrant workers in particular occupations illustrates the vulnerability of immigrant workforce in low-wage jobs. It also reflects a set of key barriers that prevent them from achieving economic stability and security within these occupations and also with occupations in other sectors. There are obviously a wide range of factors that contribute to the poor wages and working conditions that immigrants face. These include the following:

***Language Barriers:*** It is estimated that nearly half (46 percent) of all foreign-born workers are “limited English proficient” (LEP), and nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of low-wage immigrant workers are LEP. The vast majority (73%) of LEP workers speak Spanish. Problems of limited English proficiency are more prevalent for new immigrants, but can remain for many workers, despite extended time in the U.S. and lengthy work experience. An estimated 29 percent of all foreign-born workers who have been in the country for 20 years or more can still be considered LEP (Capps et al. 2003).

***Low education levels:*** While many immigrants come to the U.S. with significant education (and may face challenges related to recognition for certification received in another country), immigrants in general have much lower educational levels than U.S.-born workers. A full 30% of all immigrant workers, and 45% of low-wage immigrant workers, do not have a high school diploma, compared to only 8 percent of all native workers, and 15% of native low-wage workers. A full 18% of immigrant workers and 28% of immigrant low-wage workers do not even have a ninth-grade education, compared to only 1% of native workers, and 2% of native low-wage workers (Capps et al. 2003).

***Lack of documentation:*** As mentioned above, an estimated 10 million, or 30%, of all immigrants living in the country lack documentation. Furthermore, close to half of all new immigrants lack documentation (Camarota 2004). More detailed estimates for Mexican-born male workers in California indicate that nearly half lack documentation (Pastor and Marcelli 2004). Obviously, workers without legal status have fewer employment options, and frequently are forced to stay in jobs that pay minimum wage or below, are frequently part-time or seasonal, rarely provide benefits (such as health insurance or pensions), and frequently are dangerous and unhealthy. In 2000, for example, only 26 percent of immigrant workers had job-based health insurance (GCIR 2001).

***Exposure to discrimination, exploitation and intimidation in the workplace:*** Many immigrants face high-levels of discrimination and exploitation in the workplace, including low wages, long hours, poor working conditions and denial of other rights. Clearly not all employers exploit immigrants in these ways—many employers treat immigrant workers fairly and comply with labor and immigration laws. Nonetheless, immigrants are particularly vulnerable, given their frequent cultural and linguistic isolation. Similarly, though all workers face intimidation by their employer if they try to organize a union, immigrants are particularly vulnerable. Though it is illegal for employers to fire workers, or report suspected undocumented immigrants to immigration authorities for their organizing activities, such provisions are widely violated and rarely enforced. Furthermore, protections for immigrant workers were further undermined with the Supreme Court’s 2002 decision in the *Hoffman Plastic Compounds vs. NLRB* case, in which the court found that an undocumented immigrant who was fired in clear violation of the NLRA for his organizing activities, was not eligible to recover the remedy of back pay (Smith et al. 2003).

***Difficulty in accessing many government services, and workforce development programs:***

One-stop centers and other publicly funded programs often have difficulty providing basic language access, much less culturally competent services. Immigrants, including those who are eligible, are the least likely to access programs that support low income workers, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Unemployment Insurance. Additionally, legal immigrants entering the United States after 1996 are ineligible, during their first five years in the country, for federal programs such as Food Stamps and Medicaid that many native-born, low-wage workers regularly access to support their families (GCIR 2001).

***Vulnerability to ineffective labor laws, and spread of low-wage jobs:*** Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to wide-spread problems in the U.S. labor market. For example, immigrants often hold jobs, such as temporary and seasonal jobs, that are poorly protected under current labor laws. Even immigrants who are protected frequently do not file complaints, fearing that they will be fired, reported to immigration authorities, and/or deported. Similarly, the U.S. labor market is characterized by a rapid growth in many relatively low-skill jobs in the service, manufacturing, and agricultural industries. These jobs do not necessarily have to pay poverty-level wages with few benefits. The general degradation in pay and working conditions in these low-skill jobs particularly impacts immigrants, who are disproportionately hired in these jobs. (GCIR 2001).

We turn now to findings from the eight case study organizations and focus on the strategies and programs that have been developed to successfully address these barriers to more stable and secure employment for immigrant workers, as well improving their workplace conditions.

## **II. Programmatic Activities and Strategies**

Our research found that immigrant worker programs and strategies generally fall into four broad categories: service provision, advocacy, organizing, and enterprise development. These activities are similar to strategies pursued by a wide range of other immigrant organizations around the country.<sup>5</sup> What is especially valuable in the approach of the organizations we reviewed is both their integrated and thoughtful approach to each of their programmatic areas, and their attention to promoting larger change in the conditions immigrant workers face, rather than focusing solely on providing necessary services. These organizations hoped to change employment practices by employers or within a broad industry sector. Examples of this impact might include changing standards at the workplace like improving safety or job security, or offering ongoing educational opportunities for workers to increase their prospects and productivity at work. In this section we review lessons learned from each of their programmatic strategies, and in the concluding section we review the organizational tensions and tightropes they faced while developing these strategies.

### ***a. Service Provision***

For immigrant workers, finding a safe, secure, and stable job requires also obtaining a set of necessary social and legal services. “Services” is a broad category that covers a wide range of direct assistance that organizations provide to individual workers, including: employment training, English

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<sup>5</sup> See (GCIR 2001) for a useful review of the range of strategies being pursued around the country. Other studies of promising practices for improving immigrant economic opportunities include the following: (AFL-CIO Working For America Institute 2004; Fine 2004; Smith et al. 2003; Wrigley et al. 2003).

classes, legal services, access to health clinics, bank accounts, loans, worker rights education, and education about availability and eligibility for public support, including food stamps, TANF assistance, Earned Income Tax Credit, and other forms of public support.

Nearly all these organizations provide assistance to immigrants either directly, or through partnering with other organizations to provide the services. In all cases, though, the value of their service provision is the way it is linked with other activities and goals of the organization. Services were not seen as an end in themselves, but instead as a way of drawing people to the organization and supporting other advocacy, organizing or enterprise development goals. In some cases, such as the Workplace Project and ROC-NY, the organizations required their clients to go through their popular education and leadership development programs prior to being able to take advantage of specific services. This was seen as a way of developing more collective solutions to the problems immigrants face, and ensuring people's commitment to the goals of the organization. Thus, it is the intersection between service provision and other activities that was particularly promising in these cases.

A prime example of this is in the area of *English education and literacy training*, which was a programmatic component of nearly all the organizations we profiled. There is a widespread recognition around the country that English language and literacy training are more effective for immigrants when they are linked directly with job training, basic skills instruction, and job search assistance (Wrigley et al. 2003). There are also a number of examples around the country of cases where ESL training has been linked with sectoral employment initiatives, allowing organizations to develop a greater expertise in the occupational skills needed in the industry, permitting both fast and more successful job placement, retention and advancement opportunities (AFL-CIO Working For America Institute 2004).

The organizations we looked at often incorporated these vocational and sectoral approaches in their language education services, but they were also particularly focused on language education as a tool for empowering workers collectively and building social solidarity. FIELD for instance, provides ESL and GED training in workers' home communities (organized to coincide with the end and beginning of harvest season), and focuses the training on language used in farm activities in the area. They also emphasize community building and social ties amongst students as a central component of the training, and incorporate this into the curriculum. The first day of classes, students are encouraged to talk with each other, share experiences, discuss transportation to classes and so on, in an effort to promote collective learning processes. Modules focus on things such as helping children with their homework, good parenting skills, and health related language, all of which promote stronger family and community ties. Similarly, the Chicago Workers' Center/Day Laborer Collaboration has GED and ESL classes that are taught by resident teachers who have taken the course previously, and the ESL classes focus on workers' rights, schools and education to give workers and parents the necessary language skills to engage in discussions and decision making at work and in schools where their children are enrolled. These classes include teaching how to talk with teachers about homework as well as becoming aware of how school budgets are developed.

The commitment to linking service provision with advocacy, organizing, and enterprise development goals is also apparent in the area of *employment training services*. All of the organizations we reviewed also provide some kind of services directly related to improving immigrants' job-related skills, though the level of service varied tremendously from basic computer skills to comprehensive one-stop referral and training services. What all the organizations realize, however, is the need to

conduct employment training within the context of a broader strategy to transform employment conditions and training programs at broad level, not just amongst individual employers. One way to do this is through pursuing a sectoral focus.<sup>6</sup> The Restaurant Opportunities Center in New York (ROC-NY), for instance, partners with a local restaurant to provide cooking and bartending classes, and a local junior college, to provide computer classes and bike safety classes for delivery employees. This training is also linked with programs around cooperative development and an 8-session popular education program, both of which are designed to contribute directly to ROC-NY's two-pronged strategy to reform the restaurant industry in NY as a whole.

Similarly, FIELD focuses on the agricultural sector as a whole, recognizing that growers may operate on a thin profit margin, and that if farmworkers are to earn more, their employers need to find ways to widen that margin. Thus their training includes crop specific training, designed to improve efficiency of harvesting, along with supervisor training, to help improve workforce management and the process of labor mobility through the industry. Also, by focusing on cross-training of workers across multiple crops, they increase the number of weeks a year farmworkers earn income, thus maximizing their earnings and promoting the regional economy as a whole.

Another way of approaching changes in employment at a broad level is through attempting to transform the public job training system, which historically has had only negligible impact on labor market outcomes and has often not met the needs of immigrant workers (Bloom et al. 1997; Grubb 1995; Lafer 1994; U.S. General Accounting Office 1994). The few programs that have been demonstrated to have a significant impact are primarily based in community organizations, particularly those that are strongly networked with community colleges and other training providers (Harrison and Weiss 1998; Melendez and Harrison 1998; Melendez 1996; U.S. Department of Labor 1995; Zabrowski and Gordon 1994).

Near Northside Partners Council (NPPC) has been quite successful in linking their employment training services with a broader strategy for transforming the workforce development systems in the region. The Executive Director of NNPC, for example, serves on the WIB board and has focused on promoting the understanding that CBOs maintain the most proximate relationship with community and are thus best suited to provide services. In the one-stop center they have built, they have created an integral mix of services (including GED/ESL, computer skills, family planning and substance abuse, primary health care classes, day care), some provided by themselves and some in partnership with other organizations. Their own workforce development training is an integrated suite that ranges from literacy, through specific occupationally based skill-training, to job placement.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a now growing evidence that sectoral approaches to workforce development can have significantly greater impact on employment outcomes. The Aspen Institute, for example, in evaluating the labor market experiences of more than 700 participants in six different non-profit sectoral initiatives around the country, found that among those working after participating in the program, median earnings for participants rose from \$8,580 to \$14,040 after one year, and to \$17,732 by the end of their second year follow-up. The percentage of individuals working year-round rose from 23 percent prior to training, to 55 percent in the first year following training, to 66 percent in the second year (Aspen Institute 2002). An analysis of other sectoral employment initiatives conducted by Public Private Ventures found similar results, with participants reported on averaging a 30 percent increase in hourly earnings in two years, with those working year-round rising from 22 percent of participants in the year prior to participating in the program, to 49 percent one year after receiving training, to 61 percent two years after training. As a result, median annual earnings of workers in the program rose from \$10,552 in the year prior to participating in the program to \$18,875 two years after participating (PPV 2002) and as reported by PPV staff in a meeting on sectoral employment initiatives held at the Aspen Institute, Washington DC, April 21-22, 2004.

Other services that organizations provide, such as enterprise development training and legal representation, are also integrally linked with strategies that fundamentally shift the ways that employment training and education approaches – both private and public – can better meet needs of the growing immigrant workforce.

### ***b. Advocacy***

Many organizations have successfully linked social services to employment training and education approaches, and some have also added an advocacy dimension to ensure that public policy approaches support immigrant workers and create openings for employment and education. Advocacy refers to a range of activities designed to improve working conditions through improved public policy, government regulation and enforcement of existing laws. It includes research, publishing reports, lobbying for new laws and changing existing laws, working with government agencies to improve monitoring, and bringing law suits against employers that violate existing laws and regulation.

Advocacy campaigns may involve both immigrant and native-born workers, and include a range of strategic allies, including unions, law firms and legal organizations, religious institutions, and even business allies. Oftentimes advocacy campaigns emerge out of organizing and leadership development efforts; at other times, campaigns draw on the organizing efforts of coalition partners (see discussion of organizing and leadership development that follows). The range of campaigns organizations have been involved in is widespread, and includes action at local, state and even federal levels. For example:

- The Garment Workers Center in the spring of 2001 helped garment workers launch a visible public campaign against Forever 21, a large women's clothing retailer when workers in six factories under contract with Forever 21 did not receive their minimum wages and overtime pay and were forced to work in dirty and dangerous conditions. The workers, along with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center filed a lawsuit. The case was originally dismissed but appealed, and in March 2004, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals overruled the dismissal, allowing legal suit to be filed in the California Supreme Court. Meanwhile, in 2002, one of the manufacturers contracted by Forever 21 agreed to pay \$104,000 to seven workers with the agreement to pay minimum wage and overtime pay to workers in the factories with which it contracts. In addition, the firm agreed to sponsor meetings and trainings for its contractors and workers, initiate a toll-free phone number to report labor and safety violations, and send independent monitors to check pay and conditions. Employers' steps toward improving working conditions and showing respect to its workers led to the end of a national boycott on Forever 21 garments in December, 2004.
- Near Northside Partners Council's first campaigns were centered around health care in the school system. They were able to mobilize a core group of residents that leveraged resources for a health center in one of the neighborhood schools, Rufino Mendoza Elementary. After these successes, NNPC moved on to advocacy for improved housing in the neighborhood. Because it is a historical neighborhood, there is a unique and beautiful housing stock, but very little income to maintain it. Their work eventually led to \$1.2 million in model block funding, and eventually led NNPC to take on a comprehensive community development approach that focuses on housing, workforce development, and organizing/advocacy work around diverse issues, including winning Latino representation in formal political circles.

Advocacy, as we have defined as promoting policy change on behalf of affected individuals and communities, is distinct and quite different from community organizing, which focuses on building collective empowerment at a community level. The organizational activities and skills required are distinctly different, and it is difficult to pursue both effectively. Advocacy work typically requires greater knowledge of legal structures and policy processes, with significant research skills. In practice, the organizers we talked with focused much more of their own efforts on community organizing (see below), rather than advocacy itself, even though they saw advocacy as an essential complement to their community organizing efforts. Yet advocacy for significant change becomes impossible without the mobilization of a significant constituency for change, which ultimately depends on organizing. For these organizations, much of the advocacy was pursued in part through their networking and coalition building efforts. The combination of organizing and advocacy through coalitions both increases the potential combined constituency, and allows for greater effectiveness through improved division of labor.

### ***c. Community Organizing and Leadership Development***

Organizing refers to activities designed to build on-going collective organization and engaging in leadership development among immigrant workers to take action on their own behalf. For many of the organizations we looked at, direct organizing was seen as the core of their activities, and what they saw as their most valuable set of activities. The problems immigrants face are viewed as both rooted in, and further exacerbated by, their isolation, marginalization and fragmentation. Overcoming this ultimately depends on promoting more collective solutions to problems immigrants face, and building this collective identity into a significant and sustained power base.

Clearly one way to develop collective power is through organizing campaigns that build a broad base of membership and worker involvement in collective activities. For example, the Workplace Project wraps organizing into its various programs: in order to receive legal services, workers must attend an eight-week workers rights workshop, and they must bring a group of workers to attend the workshop with them. In addition to building their memberships through provision of social services, the organizations we reviewed also developed issue-specific campaigns to build their membership bases and mobilize a broad base of other allies to influence particular policy decisions.

An example of such change was an early campaign to organize workers at the Aztec Foods plant in Chicago to successfully shut down the corrupt incumbent Distillery Workers Union and replaced it with the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America. This effort raised the visibility of immigrant workers' struggles and helped launch the formation of the Chicago Area Workers Center, a workers-led organization of low-wage and immigrant workers.

The employment training programs of Near Northside Partners Council's emerged out of community organizing focused around health care in the local school system. Organizing a core group of residents, NNPC leveraged resources for a health center at Rufino Mendoza Elementary school and then turned their attention to neighborhood housing issues. Building the base of residents in the process, NNPC was able to leverage \$1.2 million in model block funding. However, once they discovered that there was insufficient income amongst neighborhood residents to maintain the historic housing stock, NNPC realized that a workforce development strategy must be a piece of its overall organizing and advocacy work.



#### ***d. Enterprise Creation***

Some of the organizations have developed successful enterprise development strategies in order to move workers into owners of their own individually, as well as collectively, owned businesses. This turn toward enterprise creation reflects a strategic and proactive strategy for undocumented workers, since owners of a business do not need a work permit or a social security number (SSN), and earnings can be better. Enterprise creation involves a set of activities to assist immigrants in establishing and running their own businesses, which are often, though not always, run as a cooperative. Assistance may include loans, technical assistance and training, management and marketing assistance, accounting and financial management training and assistance.

For undocumented workers in particular, enterprise promotion can be a particularly productive activity. For one, the legislation and regulation around ownership of enterprises is significantly different than around the documentation required for the employment relationship. Secondly, it gives immigrants a position of control over their own workplace conditions, and makes them less vulnerable to employer discrimination. On the other hand, operating a business successfully is a very difficult task, and it can be made more difficult by creating a cooperative structure. Furthermore, the number of workers who can benefit directly from cooperative is relatively small. Nonetheless, there are some promising lessons to be learned from efforts to promote enterprises.

In the mid-1990s organizers in what would become Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES) began assisting immigrant and other women to identify possible business opportunities. The decision to establish a cooperatively owned business venture structured as a limited liability corporation, provided a business vehicle for many immigrant women, primarily Latinas many of whom had little formal education. The success of their environmentally-sound house cleaning business and retail party store has been replicated; a total of three cooperatives now exist in the Bay Area. Similarly, ROC-NY helped displaced restaurant workers become collective owners of a successful "tablecloth restaurant" with responsible business practices that provide fair wages and benefits for its workers while turning a profit.

Other organizations recognize that entrepreneurial strategies may help immigrant workers find a foothold in a changing economy. With the sunseting of the international Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA) in January 2005, garment industries around the world will be no longer protected by quotas and now vulnerable to intense competition worldwide. In Los Angeles, the Garment Workers Center anticipates the inevitable decline of the garment industry and the loss of jobs from this policy change and is beginning to explore business and enterprise development strategies to create employment and ownership opportunities for a workforce of immigrant women.

### **III. Conclusion: Organizational Challenges, Tensions and Tightropes**

Despite their successes, the organizations we interviewed all experienced and overcame organizational challenges in providing the range of strategies necessary to address and meet the needs of immigrant workers and create viable employment opportunities. From our analysis of the strategies and programs discussed above, we conclude by lifting up some of the organizational challenges that community-based organizations consider when developing their programs and point to ways that they addressed these challenges. In our research, we identified a number of challenges that were common across many of the organizations.

### *Challenges and Opportunities of Being a Direct Service Provider*

There is debate about the relative benefits of directly providing services versus focusing more on advocacy and community organizing (while perhaps brokering relationships with other organizations to provide needed services). Potential disadvantages of becoming a direct service provider include the challenges of developing the technical and management skills to successfully provide services, and the danger of becoming so focused on providing effective services that broader social change objectives become neglected.

On the other hand, becoming a direct service provider can have benefits beyond simply helping individuals. For instance, the Near Northside Partners Council in Ft. Worth has found that becoming a direct service provider has created a more proximate, trusting relationship with the community. This role also boosts their legitimacy and leverage in policy-making circles, thus supporting their advocacy and community organizing objectives. Primavera's services for the homeless directly feeds into their placement and training programs, and builds a core of volunteers to promote their advocacy efforts. The Workplace Project on Long Island (NY) has focused on an organizing model for their work with day laborers, working with Catholic Charities to administer a day laborers' center. While they chose to enter into this partnership because of a concern for the drain on resources of running the center, they also realize that bypassing service provision sacrifices some control over the center itself and makes it harder to use the center as a basis for their organizing activities.

### *Challenges and Opportunities of Business Development Strategies*

A number of initiatives around the country, such as WAGES in the Bay Area and ROC-NY, promote the development of businesses as a strategy for improving economic opportunities. Others such as the Garment Worker Center are beginning to explore these strategies as they face uncertain industry future and inevitable job losses. Enterprise creation can be a valuable and empowering strategy for helping immigrant workers. Starting a new business or cooperative, however, is a difficult venture and the number of people who can benefit directly is potentially quite small.

Thus, it is critical to explore ways that promoting business development can be linked with other activities to maximize the impact on a broader number of people. ROC-NY does this by integrating their enterprise creation initiative into a broader campaign to transform employment conditions in New York's restaurant industry as a whole. Running a restaurant with decent employment conditions provides them with credibility in the business community and a model of a 'high-road' business that supports their advocacy efforts. WAGES hopes to have an impact on the home-cleaning industry in part by 'formalizing the informal economy', creating a model of a cooperatively-run, limited liability corporation (LLCs) that empowers immigrants. By competing as ecologically friendly cooperatives, they hope to raise the bar in the industry as a whole, simultaneously appealing to consumer's ecological consciousness and minimizing worker owners' exposure to toxic cleaning supplies.

### *Challenges and Opportunities of Advocacy Campaigns*

There is widespread agreement that effectively addressing employment problems of immigrant workers requires more than providing valued services to individual workers. There is an urgent need for community organizing efforts that can build power for immigrant workers, to better defend their rights, change employment practices in sectors or metropolitan regions, and change relevant policies at a local, state and even national level. In the context of unstable employment opportunities and unstable workers, groups are experimenting with a range of new approaches for achieving these goals.

As mentioned above, a number of organizations use service provision and/or business development as part of attracting members and building community legitimacy, thus supporting their organizing and advocacy efforts. Approaches being pursued by workers centers throughout the country include: expanding 'joint and several' liability coverage beyond the agricultural sector, targeting industries to raise wages or provide health benefits, and organizing coordinated local and national actions and boycotts against particular employers. Many groups talk about the importance of building coalitions with other organizations. While there are some inspiring examples across the country of powerful local coalitions being built, in many cases these coalitions are limited (especially in many cases when it comes to trying to build ties with unions) and there is a pronounced absence of strong and comprehensive regional, state or national networks. Finally, while there are no 'best' structures for building effective organizing campaigns and coalitions, it is clear that structure does matter, particularly around decision-making processes, abilities to secure and allocate resources, and practices of sharing credit and recognition (both within the organization and publicly).

### *Challenges and Opportunities of Community Building and Organizing*

Strong workforce development with immigrants includes building collective identity and action. These efforts go beyond the ties of membership organizations or cooperatives enterprises, to include the structure of day-to-day activities that promote an increased collective consciousness and collective action. For example, the Workplace Project provides legal services to day laborers, but has been moving beyond individual consultations by linking the legal services to an eight-week workers rights workshop, and requiring that individuals receiving legal assistance must take the workshop and organize a group of workers to take the workshop with them. The goal is to promote a group perspective in which day laborers not only recognize their common problems but explore together the rights they have and ways they can change employers actions on a broader scale.

Allocation of staff resources, including the hiring/and or training of organizers, must consider meeting individual needs, as well as providing the necessary political education and leadership supports and opportunities to strengthen the collective influence of immigrant workers in the policy and decision making that affects them. In some cases, organizations integrate these efforts within their own organizations; in other cases, the organization taps into alliances or partners with other institutions such as organizing and advocacy groups, educational institutions, legal firms, employers, and social service agencies through workforce development networks.

### *Implications for the NIIs*

The case studies and analysis were structured to inform the NII's for developing employment strategies for low-skilled immigrant workers. Here, we highlight a few of the implications for the current NII efforts. For example, MII's previous service provision positioned them much like the NNPC, however in their intermediary role, there will be a need to link services in partnership with other organizations while maintaining the connection to their base community.

The coalition building aspect will be important to both NIIs. As OEPA considers its efforts to help day laborers, they will most likely find it necessary to work with other groups if they decide to develop a day labor center. While there is not a standard coalition model to replicate, any advocacy approach should pay attention to the structure of its coalition early in its process to avoid common pitfalls like agreeing on how to share credit and agendas. Coalitions can mobilize resources and move policies, but the base must still be engaged to drive the organizing. As the NIIs have already demonstrated, any educational or enterprise related activities should tie in leadership development and community building. This approach is needed to give tools and build the confidence of a relatively vulnerable workforce.

The following two Tables layout the specific strategies of each case studied for the NIIs to apply to their neighborhoods. Table 5 begins with identifying barriers, then points to the strategies to overcome them and indicates which groups have used these strategies successfully. Table 6 lays out the four broad categories of strategies we have identified along with the more specific approaches, and then as a reference shows which organizations are using these strategies either directly or through partner organizations.

For MII's plans to influence the formation of the City's Adult Learning Center, referring to the first rows of Table 5 (titled: language barriers and low education levels) might be the most relevant, as they show the need for different kinds of training and political education. For OEPA's exploration of creating a day labor center they might look more to Table 5's last two rows (titled: lack of documentation and vulnerability to ineffective labor laws and spread of low wage jobs) for addressing their residents' issues. Finally, all groups will have an awareness of the middle rows (titled: discrimination and exploitation and difficulty in accessing government services) as they are seen as a resource in the neighborhood to meet pressing workforce and other needs.

### *Conclusion*

We have attempted to present a set of case examples of immigrant worker programs and strategies that highlight the organizational and programmatic challenges faced by community-based organizations in meeting the needs of immigrant workers and their communities. The following tables summarize the different approaches described in the case studies. Clearly, each organization is operating within in its local economic and political context, however these successful approaches illustrate ways of dealing with obstacles facing all immigrant workers. Innovative efforts that consider the circumstances of this resilient yet vulnerable workforce will be important as this workforce grows and gains greater recognition.

The success of these community and worker-based approaches will require further expansion and replication in order to continue to meet the growing immigrant workforce in response to changes in the nation's economy. The nation's workforce development and training policies are now being reconsidered as employers look for more ways to raise workers' skills. Further, the reauthorization of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—the largest source of federal funding for job training, adult basic education, and English as a second language (ESL) instruction—would give states and providers more incentives to serve limited English proficient (LEP) populations and encourage programs to combine adult education, ESL, and job training services if proposals now on the table are adopted (Capps et al. 2003).

The lessons learned from these case studies provide useful insights and considerations for groups such as Mayfair Improvement Initiative and One East Palo Alto in the San Francisco Bay Area but also other organizations grappling with the challenges of supporting workers and their communities. Networking amongst these organizations is critical to avoid fragmentation and isolation, facilitate sharing best practices, and develop more effective divisions of labor.

**Table 5:  
Summary of Barriers and Successful Approaches,  
By Case Study Organization**

<b><i>Barrier</i></b>	<b><i>Strategies</i></b>	<b><i>Organization</i></b>
Language barriers	ESL Classes	Chicago Day Laborers Collaborative, FIELD, Primavera Works, Near Northside Partners Council
Low education levels	Computer training and peer-teaching; Peer-teaching; Vocational Education courses	Chicago Day Laborers Collaborative, Near Northside Partners Council, FIELD, WAGES, Primavera Works
Discrimination and Exploitation	Political education Popular education strategies	Workplace Project, Restaurant Opportunities Center-NY
Difficulty in accessing government services	Provision of social services and legal assistance	Near Northside Partners Council, Workplace Project
	Provision of social services through coalition partners	Garment Workers Center
Lack of documentation	Formation of collective enterprise Advocacy and immigrant rights	WAGES, Restaurant Opportunities Center-NY, Chicago Day Laborers Collaborative, Garment Workers Center through the Los Angeles Workers Advocacy Coalition (LAWAC)
Vulnerability to ineffective labor laws and spread of low-wage jobs	Monitoring and accountability of labor laws Improving conditions for day laborers	Chicago Day Laborers Collaborative, Garment Workers Center through the Los Angeles Workers Advocacy Coalition (LAWAC), Restaurant Opportunities Center-NY

<b>Summary Table 6: Immigrant worker programs and strategies by organization</b>								
(√=organization does this activity) (p=organization does this activity through partners)	Chicago Workers Center	FIELD	Garment Workers Center	Near Northside Partners Council	Primavera Works	Restaurant Opportunities Center	WAGES	The Workplace Project
<b>I. Service Provision (d=direct, p=through partners)</b>								
<b>Education and Training</b>								
GED Courses	√			<b>p</b>				
ESL Courses	√	√		√		<b>p</b>		
Computer Courses				<b>p</b>		<b>p</b>		
Vocational Training		√		√	√	<b>p</b>	√	
<b>Social Services (d=direct, p=through partners)</b>								
Job Placement				√	√			
Housing Assistance					√			
Family Planning				<b>p</b>				
Substance Abuse Counseling				<b>p</b>				
Food assistance					√			
Daycare				<b>p</b>				
Legal Services			<b>p</b>					√
<b>II. Advocacy</b>								
Workplace Rights	√	√	√		√	√		√
Access of Social Services			√	√	√			√
Immigrants Rights and Immigration Policy	√		√		√	√		√
Workforce Development Policy			√	√				
Coalition Building <sup>7</sup>	√	√	√	√				√
<b>III. Organizing and Leadership Development</b>								
Workplace	√	√	√			√		√
Neighborhood	√	√		√				√
Ethnic Specific	√	√		√				√
Paid Organizers	√	√	√			√		√
Leadership Development/Training	√	√	√			√	√	√
<b>IV. Enterprise Development</b>								
Direct Operation					√	√		
Technical Assistance							√	
Financial Assistance							√	
Industry or Sectoral Approach		√			√	√	√	

<sup>7</sup> Coalition building is not limited to advocacy but is highlighted here.



#### IV. Appendices: Case Study Profiles

Each of the following case study profiles is organized into the following sections:

- Background and Issues Addressed
- Goals of Program/Policy
- Strategy and Program Approach
  - Education/Training
  - Organizing
  - Network/Coalition Building
  - Advocacy/Electoral
- Successes and Outcomes
- Organizational Infrastructure and Resources

#### List of Interviews

Felipa Mena, Executive Director  
Miriam Perez, Treasurer  
***Chicago Area Workers' Center***

Tim Bell, Executive Director  
***Chicago Day Laborer Collaboration***

Bronwyn Mauldin, Director of Corporate and  
Technical Services  
***Strengthen Our Agribusiness Region  
(SOAR), a project of the Farmworker  
Institute for Education and Leadership  
Development (FIELD)***

Kimi Lee, Executive Director  
***Garment Workers Center***

David Lozano, Workforce Development  
Director & Abby Gamboa, Executive Director  
***Near Northside Partners Council***

Karen Uhlich, (former) Executive Director  
***Primavera Works***

Saru Jayaraman, Executive Director  
Fekkak Mamdouh, Assistant Director  
Stefan Mailgavanam, Cooperative Project  
Manager.  
***Restaurant Opportunities Project, New  
York City***

Hillary Abell, Executive Director  
***Women's Action to Gain Economic  
Security (WAGES)***

Nadia Marin-Molina, Executive Director  
***The Workplace Project***

## Chicago Area Workers' Center/Day Laborer Collaboration (DLC)<sup>8</sup>

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### Background and Issues Addressed

In 2000, a core group of immigrant worker leaders from the Erie Neighborhood House founded the Chicago Area Workers' Center in the primarily immigrant Latino community of Northwest Chicago. The community faces high levels of high school drop outs, few relevant classes are available in the community where few residents speak English, and many are undocumented. Immigrant workers have little power because they feel fearful in the face of public institutions and companies who use INS and legal tools to marginalize and exploit them. Together with their coalition, the Day Laborer Collaboration (DLC), the Chicago Area Workers' Center (CAWC) work to organize and empower undocumented, primarily Spanish speaking, low wage workers to stop the elimination of permanent jobs for immigrants and end the highly exploitive hiring practices of the day laborer industry, particularly fast growing temp agencies.

In a 2002 survey of undocumented immigrants, the Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago found that 5 percent of the Chicago metro area labor market were undocumented, representing a growing segment of the low-wage workforce. The survey found that approximately 30% of undocumented immigrants work in restaurant related positions, such as handpacking and assembly, and janitorial and cleaning jobs. The average hourly wage earned was \$7.00/hour. For women undocumented workers, unemployment rates are five times or 20% higher than all undocumented workers because of gender discrimination and lack of child care options. Only 25% of undocumented workers were covered by health insurance.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This case study draws on materials developed earlier including background material for the site visit to Chicago, July 2004 and notes taken from our discussions with workers and organizers from the Workers' Center and Day Labor Collaborative while in Chicago. Sources: Presentation by Tim Bell, October 3, 2003 at "Shadows to Strategies: A Symposium on Undocumented Labor, Workforce Development & Community Improvement", San Jose, California; United Electrical website ([http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/uen\\_0402\\_azteca.html](http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/uen_0402_azteca.html));

<sup>9</sup> See "Chicago's Undocumented Immigrants: An Analysis of Wages, Working Conditions, and Economic Contributions", University of Illinois at Chicago, 2002 ([http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/uicued/Publications/RECENT/undoc\\_full.pdf](http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/uicued/Publications/RECENT/undoc_full.pdf))

## **Goal(s) of program/policy**

The Chicago Workers' Center establishes programs that help immigrant workers secure training and education that empowers them in the workplace as well as in their community, and builds power to develop job training through adult education. They have provided computer training to help promote immigrants from working in meat packing to placement in growing informational sector in Chicago.

## **Strategy and Program Approach**

### *Leadership Development, Education and Training*

CAWC's organizing model is based on leadership development and worker empowerment. One of the foundational pieces is self-esteem training that helps workers find the confidence to raise their voices about abuses that they experience. From step one, workers drive the process: They make the decisions about when and where to organize, they conduct the trainings, and they take the lead in negotiating. As CAWC Lead Organizer Miriam Perez notes "The main difference is that we're the workers and we do what we feel and know is the right thing to do. Before, at other places, organizers just moved us around from protest to protest, and we didn't even know why we were doing things. But we have to show that we have the power. And that's what we're doing here." She also notes that in general, worker organizers are more effective than white and/or professional organizers in their ability to connect and organize other workers.

Workers meet once a week at a local church; new members are brought to meetings by other members met through personal contacts or through contact during door-to-door visits by organizers. This face-to-face interaction, rather than mass distribution of flyers, is what brings people to meetings and keeps them connected to other workers at the Center.

The Workers' Center/Day Laborer Collaboration uses a promotor/a or training-the-trainer model of education in a number of areas. Students who enroll in computer courses receive free classes and in turn commit to teaching the following classes. Similarly, GED and ESL courses are taught by resident teachers who have taken the course. The program has graduated more than 150 leader/teachers. ESL classes focus on workers rights, schools and education to give workers and parents the necessary language skills to engage in discussions and decision making at work and in schools where their children are enrolled; these include teaching how to talk with teachers about homework as well as becoming aware of how school budgets are developed.

### *Organizing and Campaigns*

In one of the earliest organizing campaigns the Workers Center helped Aztec Foods workers to successfully deauthorize dues payments to the corrupt incumbent union Distillery Workers Union and successfully organize into a local of United Electrical (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America), a national union representing approximately 35,000 workers in manufacturing, public sector and private non-profit sector jobs.

More recently, the CAWC has focused attention on the growing number of temporary employment agencies in Chicago that have emerged as the primary source of employment for day labor. More than 400 temp agencies to take advantage of the shifting employment needs of area companies,

many of who seek a stable flow of low-skilled, nonpermanent, low-wage labor. Many of the temp agencies exploit immigrant workers by placing them in sweatshops and factories with poor working conditions and by withholding wages and benefits. As an approach to intervene in industry standards and operations, the CAWC together with the Day Laborers Collaborative have developed two key strategies:

- Documentation and Exposure

A key component of CAWC work centers around documentation of the abuses and dangerous working conditions experienced by workers. CAWC infiltrates the most violating agencies and the sweatshops that they service and use this information to file complaints with state labor agencies to shut down the worst agencies. Video footage taken by organizers and worker leaders has resulted in the exposure of conditions on local TV news such as NBC

(<http://www.nbc5.com/unit5investigates/3569776/detail.html>)

- Employers Code of Conduct

Worker members of the CAWC along with other workers and other organizations in the Day Laborer Collaborative developed an industry *Code of Conduct*, a set of principles that set forth bottom line expectations that CAWC and workers want to establish for the temporary employment industry. Included in the Code are basic conduct standards such as wage and benefit standards. Industries are challenged to sign onto the Code, setting up a higher and competitive standard for temp agencies to follow. Agencies such as Impact Staffing have signed the Code, a temp agency that provide holidays, vacations, has an established grievance process, and does not charge employers if they want to hire temp workers permanently.

The overall strategy is to shut down the “bottom-feeder” temp agencies with the worst practices and highlighting those employers who practice the Code of Conduct. As workers continue to expose the working conditions and wage violations of temp agencies, workers are directed to temp agency/employers who practice the Code of Conduct. Mike Jin of the Center for Community and Labor Research, a nonprofit research organization that provides research assistance to CAWC and DLC, notes that the approach dispels the notion that all companies are evil; instead there are some firms with whom CAWC forms tactical alliances with in order to encourage temp agencies to improve their operations. By creating a negative media image for firms that do not sign the Code of Conduct and promoting those who practice the Code of Conduct, CAWC and its partner organizations work to improve the industry standard to benefit workers.

### *Network/Coalition Building*

The CAWC works with the Day Labor Collaboration and its organizational members as well as local labor unions and workers organizations. Through their Aztec Foods campaign, the Workers Center allied with Jobs with Justice and members of UE Locals 1166 and 1114 and UE supporters from National Tissue in Milwaukee. In 2002, the Center participated in the design of a survey of more than 1500 undocumented workers in the Chicago area by the University of Illinois Chicago.

The Center continues their on-going partnership with the Day Laborer Collaborative (DLC), a coalition of organizations working to organize, train and unite Latino and African American day laborers. Through the DLC, the CAWC continues their adult education, leadership, GED, and ESL programs

## **Successes and Outcomes**

The formation of a Chicago Area Workers' Center by worker leaders, contributes to a growing set of organizations in Chicago focused on issues facing undocumented and immigrant workers. The CAWC has developed a worker led organizing model that has won successful campaigns such as the effort to decertify Distillery Worker Union at Aztec Foods and democratically replace the union with United Electrical.

Worker members and leaders of CAWC have taken the lead in exposing the working conditions and employment practices of the temporary agency industry. Working with other labor, employment, and immigrant workers organizations, CAWC workers developed a Code of Conduct which they use in their organizing campaign as a “high-road” strategy to model new and worker-centered employment practices. Despite some successes however, Tim Bell of the Day Labor Collaborative notes that there is much work to do to transform the industry as the continued decline of permanent employment opportunities for immigrants continues to create a high demand for highly exploitative day labor industry.

## **Organizational Infrastructure and Resources**

The Chicago Area Workers Center works closely with its partner organization, the Day Laborer Collaborative. Organizations within the Collaborative provide education and services such as GED, ESL and leadership classes supporting CAWC while allowing the latter to launch direct action and organizing campaigns. In one of their initial efforts, the Workers Center (at that time, the Workers Committee) decided to launch a union organizing campaign at Aztec Foods (see campaign description above). This organizational structure helped retain the needed City-provided funds for the social services at the Erie House while the Worker Center organized against the owner of Aztec Foods, a large contributor to the Mayor at the time. Funds to support the CAWC comes from grants; support for education and services are provided through the Collaborative.

**Strengthen Our Agribusiness Region (SOAR)**  
*a project of the*  
**Farmworker Institute for Education and Leadership Development (FIELD)**

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FIELD offers valuable lessons on building a sectoral approach to workforce development with many of the stakeholders involved. At least partially due to the rural geography, they noticed the importance of working regionally as well. The overall approach is “benefiting workers in the context of benefiting employers.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Background and Issues Addressed**

The current configuration of the Farmworker Institute for Education and Leadership Development (FIELD) was founded originally in the late 1970’s by Cesar Chavez. The programs were dormant for many years until 2000 when FIELD was awarded a planning grant through the Department of Labor. FIELD has basically served as the convener and coordinator of SOAR (Strengthen Our Agribusiness Region) which has brought together employers, educational institutions, service providers, training providers, elected officials, and workers to collaborate on having a healthier, more stable, productive workforce. The grant enabled workforce research in 2000 which led to a pilot training program in 2001-2002. Due to the success of the pilot they are currently implementing ongoing trainings. This unique partnership was modeled after a 1996 UFW/Employer collaboration in the rose industry where training with workers showed improvements in profits and worker earnings. This type of collaboration recognizes the need to both improve farmworker income, but also strengthen the sector and surrounding communities.

A 2002 report on FIELD titled, *Investing in the Agricultural Workforce: New Strategies to Strengthen Rural Economies and Communities* describes how the consortium was founded, the current statistics of farmworkers in the region, the challenges employers face, the trends in the sector and recommendations to policy makers and practitioners for improving workforce development.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Phone conversation with Bronwyn Mauldin, July 1, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> 2002. *Investing in the Agricultural Workforce: New Strategies to Strengthen Rural Economies and Communities*. Farmworker Institute for education and Leadership Development, May. [Source not in bibliography]

## Goal(s) of program/policy

FIELD's mission is to "promote economic and social prosperity for Latinos and other low-income individuals and their families to help them realize their inherent worth and strengthen their communities." SOAR's primary goal is to improve employment opportunities and increase annual earnings for farmworkers through two methods: enabling workers to move up career ladders, and working more weeks of the year. Farmwork is not known for having much opportunity, in fact most children of farmworkers do not want to become farmworkers. FIELD operates under the assumption that while agriculture is a difficult sector, it is honorable work and there will always be a demand for people to work the fields and packing sheds. The challenge and goal is to make it a job where there are better earnings and opportunities.

Cross training in different crops enables more year round work—workers are employed typically about 26 weeks out of the year.<sup>12</sup> There is a misconception that the work is unskilled, yet employers know that workers become more adept in certain crops and increase their productivity. Within agricultural jobs there are also supervisory roles and year round positions that are more attractive. The target population is monolingual Spanish or limited English speakers—they began training only farmworkers however, they are currently not exclusively training farmworkers.

More generally, the idea is to strengthen the sector overall. On the employer and state sides, there are several goals: training workers to keep employers in the state and investing in workers through training, which can benefit a company's bottom line and the community.

## Strategy and Program Approach

### *Educational Programming and Strategies*

The main programming of FIELD is cross-commodity training which includes vocational ESL classes that are located in the small towns (Arvin and Shafter) and industrial service classes on-site at work. For the vocational language classes they have found that locating in the home community makes it more comfortable and facilitates attendance. The beginning and end dates are linked to the harvest schedule. There are two instructors who teach language that is used on the job. The first day of class gets the students to talk to each other; as they ask each other about rides to class, it is more about community building. Everyone on staff (except one person) is bicultural/bilingual which also helps people feel more comfortable. They boast 70% completion rates for those that begin the trainings. The classes are five nights per week from 6-9 pm for a total of 150 hours. Recruitment is mostly through word of mouth, a local farmworker radio station (La Campesina) and public access TV. There are currently 20 students enrolled in each of the two locations.

According to their literature, "FIELD's curriculum is culturally and linguistically appropriate, which facilitates the learning process, resulting in higher retention of skills and overall effectiveness. The main difference between this initiative and many traditional English language programs is that FIELD delivers the training in an intensive manner (daily), by Hispanic instructors, as opposed to couple of sessions per week as commonly found in other community programs. These two features

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<sup>12</sup> Phone conversation with Bronwyn Mauldin, July 1, 2004.

of FIELD's programs have been anecdotally stated as key reasons for parents' participation and high completion rates."

Instructors have found that the students are most proud to say that now they can help their kids with their homework. Building on this feedback, they seek to structure their curriculum to meet this interest. Other practical modules include health related language that empowers people to go to the doctor without a translator and in one region they conduct culturally appropriate parenting classes.

Another program for incumbent workers is offered through the Employment Training Panel of the state of California (ETP). FIELD is contracted by ETP with employers, to provide 60 hour modules to 100 agricultural workers at the workplace on leadership, conflict resolution and communication skills. The employer matches these funds by paying their wages, a significant investment in the worker. They also provide OSHA trainings or other skills requested by the companies. FIELD has found that as trainers they must be flexible and customize their curriculum to the realities of the industry. For example, in some cases they hold trainings as early as 5:30 am since workers must be in the fields early in the day.

FIELD has found that skills alone are not enough because they also need a process to move workers. The idea of increasing self-confidence and the ability to advocate for oneself is one of the main outcomes of the training. They look for and build natural leadership which includes learning about resolving problems on the job through conflict resolution courses. They try to identify the first level of supervisors to enter the trainings. This both enables them to move up and opens up positions for other workers. While some of the workers may move out of agriculture, the skills are transferable to their home and community lives as well.

### *Network/Coalition Building*

During the planning phases of SOAR, the consortium of stakeholders was crucial both for securing funding and developing the project. By talking about the "agricultural community" and improving the community overall, they were able to bring in a diverse group of players. Employer involvement has been key. It brought a high level of credibility to the group in the eyes of regional employers. Having a strong connection to the community, as opposed to outsiders coming in to fix the community, was also important, as was bringing in people with technical skills.

At the beginning they met regularly to decide on what to include in the trainings and advising the process. It was necessary to have a lead organization to do the coordination of the group. Now that they are past the pilot phase, the coalition meets less frequently though they still remain in contact informally, which has proven to be equally useful. Having relationships with companies is valuable access. FIELD also emphasizes the importance of educating policy makers and growers about the benefits of training farmworkers.

### **Successes and Outcomes**

FIELD views program evaluation as significant part of their work. They conduct pre and post tests for trainings and in depth interviews. However, they have found that measuring immediate impact on earnings is hard to do. Evaluations have shown to some degree what is not working with their trainings and how to improve them. They usually select 3-5 aspects that they can prove they have



been able to accomplish, find a proxy, and report periodically. The total number of students trained since March of 2001 total nearly 6,000. 46% of the students have participated in the ESL training and 54% went through industrial service classes. They would like to build an alumni association of graduates to return and advise the organization on what has worked for them.

On the employer side, they have found that employers are cautious to share information, making it difficult to measure impacts. This is not to say that it is impossible. In the rose industry example they were able to show clear bottom line profit increases.<sup>13</sup> Their ability to show impacts is dependent upon employer tracking which is usually not available. While they may not have quantitative data that measures reduced costs, they do have qualitative feedback from employers that perceive that there have been improvements with their workforce.

### **Organizational infrastructure and Resources**

FIELD as, the led organization for SOAR, is well staffed with the following positions:

- Executive Director: strong labor background
- Deputy Director: strong workforce development background
- Director of Corporate and Technical Services: (research assistant coming next year), program evaluation, fund development, program research, and policy advising
- Director of Industrial Services: strong employer management background. Responsible for fee for service contracts, manages business partners
- Business manager: budgets, tracks spending, operational
- Director of Community Services oversees: program development, recruitment, assessment, placement, and instruction delivery with;
  - 2 Full time English instructors
  - 2 Site managers: direct community services

FIELD is funded through multiple sources. They were supported with Department of Labor planning grant for the SOAR project, they get funding through WIA workforce development funds—the 15% Governor’s discretionary funds, the local workforce board for displaced workers, Employers Training Resource (WIA county level), Employment Training Panel (State), private foundations (CA Endowment funding for OSHA training, Ford, Hitachi), and some smaller sources. FIELD reports a constant need, like most non-profits, to keep fund raising. They rely on all the staff to assist with this process—according to their fund developer, “it is always a team effort.”

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<sup>13</sup> 2002. *Investing in the Agricultural Workforce: New Strategies to Strengthen Rural Economies and Communities*. Farmworker Institute for education and Leadership Development. May.

## **Garment Workers Center<sup>14</sup>**

### **Los Angeles, California**

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### **Background and Issues Addressed**

In 1995, 71 Thai garment workers were found locked in an apartment complex in the City of El Monte in Los Angeles County, the site of an illegal sewing operation where they were forced to work in sweatshop conditions. Following the raid by the U.S. Department of Labor, the workers faced imminent deportation by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Community groups immediately came together and, along with the ACLU and other legal groups, filed a lawsuit on behalf of the garment workers against their employer. The highly visible and successful lawsuit illustrated the scope and scale of issues facing garment workers in Los Angeles.

The Garment Workers Center (GWC) opened in January 2001, a collaboration of Sweatshop Watch, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the Korean Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA) and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC). The establishment of the Center created the first organization focused on organizing and empowering garment workers in Los Angeles. The Center estimates that there are more than 70,000 garment workers in Los Angeles who earn an average of \$2 to \$3 per hour with no health benefits. Like many low-wage immigrant workers, garment workers speak little English, many are undocumented, many of whom are women. Less than 1 percent of garment workers are part of a union.

The GWC's primary office is located in the fashion district in downtown Los Angeles; they opened a satellite office in Monterey Park in order to organize Asian garment workers closer to where they live and work.

### **Goal(s) of Program/Policy**

The overall mission of the GWC is to “empower garment workers in the Los Angeles area and work in solidarity with other low-wage immigrant workers and disenfranchised communities in the struggle for social, economic and environmental justice.”

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<sup>14</sup> Sources: Interview Kimi Lee July 10, 2004; Los Angeles Business Journal. “Workers’ Woes”. June 28, 2004; organizational materials provided by the Garment Workers Center.

## Strategy and Program Approach

Direct Organizing/base building and Leadership Development are the primary strategies of the Garment Worker Center. In order to expand the influence and scale of workers' organizing, GWC also uses Advocacy and Network Building/Coalition strategies as a way to link their worker members to a broader set of strategies focused on immigrant workers rights.

### *Direct Organizing/Base Building*

The GWC utilizes four components to organize workers into a base of garment workers:

- Wage and Labor Claims Assistance
- Case Management
- Workers Rights Training and Political Education
- Leadership Development

This model of worker organizing combines aspects of social service provision with political education and leadership training. Though workers initially may approach the GWC for individual issues and in search of social services, GWC maintains its focus on base building and leadership development in a number of innovative ways.

Following the worker organizing model established by Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), GWC provides social services and referral help to workers only as an initial hook to attract workers to the organization, get to know workers, and initiate levels of trust.

When workers first come to the GWC, organizers talk with workers and conduct an initial intake process and inform them about GWC, its purpose, its membership and how services are only provided if workers commit to working with GWC and its goals. By GWC's philosophy, "If workers only show interest in their own case, we don't take them." Workers are required to sign an Agreement for Help and Support (Acuerdo de Ayuda y Consejo) in which the worker makes a series of commitments to the Center. These include attending demonstrations, helping in the office, making calls to other workers, help with trainings, talk with students and other community members about the struggle of garment workers. In this way, the workers who sign up are automatically identified as potential worker leaders. If they don't sign the Agreement, GWC refers them to other social service organizations.

For new immigrant workers, particularly Asian workers, Kimi Lee notes, "it's been critical to have a service component because that's what they understand....'you're going to help me to do this' or 'I have a problem and I can go to you.' But we've always from the beginning said that is not what we've been about."

### *Leadership Development*

As members of the GWC, workers receive training and have the opportunity to develop leadership to participate in building the organization and strengthening the workers movement. These include positions as case counselors, delegates responsible for recruiting new members, press spokespersons, outreach and community representatives, and service on the Board of Directors.

When new members join the Center, it is clear that the goal of the GWC is to develop worker leadership and to encourage such leadership in GWC. While GWC paid staff conduct the research, campaigns and organizing strategies are developed by workers through committees. Involvement of workers in these campaigns is required of membership in GWC and leadership roles are clearly outlined in the Orientation Booklet provided to new members. (See also Board Development below)

The Multi-ethnic Immigrant Workers Organizing Network (MIWON) was formed in 2000 in order to unite immigrant advocacy organizations and workers within those organizations around common issues such as legalization & amnesty for undocumented immigrants. With their allies in MIWON and other worker centers across the country, GWC helped establish a year-long Worker Center Exchange which enabled eight immigrant worker organizations to come together to share experiences. Experienced staff and worker members from Los Angeles (GWC, KIWA, CHIRLA, PWC), New York (Restaurant Opportunities Center), and Florida (Coalition of Immokalee Workers) participated. Each group was given an opportunity to choose a group they would visit to spend several days with, attending meetings, holding events and experiencing the day-to-day life of other organizations. Through exchanges, organizers were able to see first hand the different methods used for recruitment, member services, leadership development and overall organizational function. In the Spring 2004, the groups convened for three days to share experiences and begin strategizing about the future of worker centers for the next 10 years. Though no specific projects emerged from this initial discussion, GWC is exploring ways to continue such exchanges to benefit both staff and worker members/leaders.

#### *Network/Coalition Building*

The GWC is a member of several networks and Coalitions which they use to build their influence and power as well as connect to and access important technical, legal, and research assistance. GWC is also a founding member of the Multi-ethnic Immigrant Workers Organizing Network (MIWON) is a collaborative project of KIWA, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), all organizations whose missions are to empower low-wage immigrant workers in Los Angeles. GWC is also a member (along with other MIWON organizations, Sweatshop Watch, CHIRLA, and the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund, an organization that helps workers in nonunion janitorial companies) of Coalition of Immigrant Worker Advocates (CIWA) a coalition of organizing, advocacy and legal organizations working on issues of immigrant workers. Through CIWA, GWC and other grassroots member organizations develop relationships between immigrant workers and California's Labor and Workforce Development Agency, Cal Occupational Health and Safety Administration and other state agencies. GWC is also a member of Enlace, a binational collaboration of low-wage worker organizations in the US and Mexico. Enlace provides training to its member organizations in organizational development, strategic and organizational management. GWC now serves on the Board of Directors of Enlace.

There is little formal relationship however between GWC and local unions such as UNITE/Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees in part because the garment workers are not a priority sector targeted for union organizing. GWC and the unions however do come together to participate together in activities such as marches, events, as well as support behind policy efforts such as legalization drives and drivers licenses for immigrants.

### *Advocacy/Electoral Strategies*

Along with their organizing successes, GWC along with allied immigrant worker and immigrant rights organizations, have had to face the challenge of monitoring their policy wins in addition to tracking ongoing changes to trade, labor and immigration policies. Rather than take on the direct responsibility for the time and skill intensive work of monitoring and engaging in these policy and regulatory discussions, GWC relies on the legal and policy organizations of the Coalition of Immigrant Worker Advocates (CIWA) who meet monthly with labor commissioners working with the Department of Labor. As mentioned above, GWC is also a founding member of MIWO, which is a collaborative project of KIWA, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), and the Garment Workers Center (GWC). While MIWON is made up of organizations that primarily use direct organization and leadership development strategies, each organization is also member of CIWA.

### *Business/enterprise development*

Shifts in trade and labor policy from the global to local levels directly impact garment workers and have pushed GWC to shift their strategies. The Multi Fiber Arrangement, negotiated and approved by the World Trade Organization, is implemented in January 2005 and will ultimately phase out current garment quotas. The lifting of these garment trade barriers is expected to eliminate most of the garment jobs in southern California and the US forcing GWC to consider workforce development and training strategies that will move former garment workers into other work outside the garment industry. GWC is working with research firm Economic Roundtable to survey workers and job training in the area to determine what economic sectors, industries, and occupations workers might be able to move toward. One of the potential directions includes development of micro-business enterprises and worker cooperatives, both accessible avenues for workers with limited English skills.

### **Successes and Outcomes**

To date GWC has waged and won several important campaigns that have benefited garment workers. In the spring of 2001, GWC helped garment workers launch a visible public campaign against Forever 21, a large women's clothing retailer when workers in six factories under contract to Forever 21 did not receive their minimum wages and overtime pay and were forced to work in dirty and dangerous conditions. Despite several meetings and letters, Forever 21 refused to pay the workers. The workers, along with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, filed a lawsuit. The case was dismissed but appealed. In 2002, one of the manufacturers contracted by Forever 21 agreed to pay \$104,000 to seven workers with the agreement to pay minimum wage and overtime pay to workers in the factors with which it contracts. In addition, the firm agreed to sponsor meetings and trainings for its contractors and workers, put out a toll-free phone number to report labor and safety violations, and sent independent monitors to check pay and conditions. In March 2004, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals recently handed low-wage workers and the GWC a significant victory by overruling the dismissal and allowing legal suit to be filed in California Supreme Court. While the legal proceedings continue, GWC and its workers continue to maintain public pressure on Forever 21 and other manufacturers.

GWC continues its campaign with allies in MIWON to demand immigrant rights and legalization, and Member workers organized to fight for drivers licenses. Each year MIWON sponsors the May 1st legalization march which draws more than 7,000 people. Through their work with CIWA, GWC successfully established a Low Wage Advisory Board to the Director of the Department of Industrial relations, which includes the Labor Commissioners Office and Cal-OSHA. CIWA also successfully pushed the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency to establish an office focused on low-wage industries.

## **Organizational infrastructure and Resources**

### *Board and staff structure*

GWC initially set up as a project under the 501(c)3 sponsorship of Sweatshop Watch. In the past two-years GWC has undergone an organizational planning and development process to establish itself as an independent nonprofit organization. Key aspects of this process include: 1) establishment of worker member-led Board of Directors; and 2) systems and guidelines outlining worker member roles, responsibilities, and leadership. In addition, GWC's program staff began a set of discussions to establish a union within GWC as a means of establishing workers rights within GWC. Staff have filed a request with NLRB to recognize this independent union.

The GWC is run by a Board of Directors comprised primarily of workers. As an 11 member Board, representational goals are currently: 6 Latinos, 3 Asians and 2 alternates. By law, officers of the Board are required to be citizens and must submit social security numbers. While such members are represented on the Board and are not worker members, the majority of the Board are worker members and the organization considers itself to be led by a Worker Board of Directors. Board members are nominated and elected annually through a formal vote of the members.

GWC core organizational structure and budget are relatively small. The GWC's annual budget of approximately \$400,000 a year supports an Executive Director, three organizers, one case manager, one health educator, and an office manager. Three of the positions are part-time. Despite the small staff, the membership of the GWC is growing. There are over 350 active members, each of whom pay dues, \$20 for every six months.

### *Role of workers*

GWC is a membership organization. With membership, workers have the following roles and responsibilities:

- Participate in actions & support the campaigns
- Bring new members into GWC
- Show commitment by give back and helping others
- Participate in setting the work and direction of GWC
- Be a peer advocate: help other workers
- Be active on the board of GWC
- Elect the worker board
- Represent GWC in coalitions, community meetings, testify at hearings, and talk to the media
- DO presentations to educate about the campaigns and struggles of workers

- Be actively involved in the work of GWC.

In addition, roles and responsibilities for workers (as well as for Board and staff) in decision making for GWC have been collectively defined and explicitly outlined as part of their organizational development process and articulated in four categories: Rules and Policies (by-laws, election to board processes, and membership responsibility); Campaign Selection (Forever-21 and Renee Straus campaigns); Project/Program Selection (Health project, Women's Group, Workshop/Topics); and Budget/Spending (materials, office supplies, campaign).

In exchange for their commitment to work with the Center, workers receive Membership Benefits such as help with wage claims, referrals to low-cost or free health services or legal help, training on workers rights and occupational health. Women have the opportunity to join a women's education and support group for women workers. After six months of active membership, workers are eligible for emergency loan funds from GWC.

## Near Northside Partners Council

Fort Worth, Texas

### *Contact Information*

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### **Background and Issues Addressed**

Founded in 1991, NNPC is a resident-led organization serving a clearly defined Latino neighborhood that hosts a large immigrant population with disproportionate rates of poverty. After winning several campaigns to scale-up health services within the education system, NNPC decided to implement a comprehensive community development approach. While their initial vision was to focus exclusively on advocacy and organizing, they decided to adopt and emphasize service provision responsibilities at the request of the community. NNPC has found that their role as a service provider has created a more proximate, trusting relationship with the community, while bolstering their legitimacy and leverage in policy-making circles.

### **Goal(s) of Program**

NNPC works to build a community that ‘works’ for its residents, particularly youth. NNPC’s vision is a community where “economic opportunities abound, social services are effectively provided to meet the needs of residents, and young adults have the confidence that they can own homes and raise families with economic security.”

### **Strategy and Program Approach**

#### *Service Provision/Policy Advocacy*

NNPC’s initial vision was to become an advocacy and organizing group that would funnel resources to external service providers working in the community. However, they found that external groups could not appropriately provide the services in a culturally competent manner. For instance, employees did not speak Spanish, or had little context for the cultural fabric of the neighborhood, or the service centers were closing their doors before most residents could access them. While at first they were excited to bring a greater share of the county’s tax dollars into the neighborhood, they began to see that the government-run one-stop was not widely used and the community was not being adequately served. For this reason, NNPC decided to acquire the funds to provide services themselves. As a result, NNPC’s identity as a service provider is inseparable from their advocacy and leadership development work.

As a service provider, NNPC has found that they have gained credibility in decision-making circles and have thus been able to figure into policy debates with more authority. For instance, Abby Gamboa, NNPC’s executive director, was offered a coveted seat on the Workforce Improvement Board. In that position, she has successfully promoted an approach to workforce development that positions community based organizations as legitimate entities that maintain the most proximate,



day-to-day relationship with residents and ensures a unique sensitivity to the specific needs of the community. NNPC's identity as service providers has also allowed them to create a close, trusting relationship with the community which enriches their leadership development work. For instance, their visibility and reputation in the community is an important factor in their effort to run a representative for the Fort Worth City Council, which does not currently have a Latino councilperson.

To house their service provision work, NNPC has created an 'alternative one-stop' in a 16,000 sq ft building which also provides their office space. NNPC has formed partnerships with diverse community institutions to compose an integral matrix of services:

- The local school district provides GED and ESL courses;
- NNPC secured funding to build a computer lab where local college students provide information technology courses;
- Volunteers of America is doing family planning and substance abuse counseling;
- Local banks provide free income-tax services and financial literacy courses;
- The city government provides health care classes;
- A regional organization called Campfire has started a daycare project, which NNPC staffs itself;
- NNPC staffs its own comprehensive workforce development program.

### *Workforce Development*

Before NNPC took a role in providing services, the governmental workforce development was fragmented and discouraging to residents: there were few services offered, and, more important, there was little cohesion between the services. NNPC's program emphasizes a continuum of services that forms a clear and tangible path which leads to a job. The three pieces of this continuum are *literacy, skill-building, and job placement*.

- *Workplace Literacy:*

NNPC has designed an ESL curriculum that is workplace relevant that teaches students how to communicate with managers and fill out applications. However, because there is so much vocational diversity within the community, NNPC chose not to create a set curriculum, but rather, a curriculum that responds to common communication in the average workplace.

- *Targeted Skill-Building:*

NNPC has found that there are 'zones of demand' for bilingual applicants, and has been able to almost exclusively fill the bilingual training niche in the region. They train clients to be bilingual office assistants, for instance, and then place these individuals in private and governmental positions. NNPC has also been highly successful when they've been able to focus their efforts on a particular high-density industry. For instance, because there are five State Farm Insurance offices in the neighborhood, they have been able to tailor their job training accordingly, and have nurtured a relationship with business owners and managers in those industries. In general, NNPC has developed a solid relationship with employers who contact them looking for references. Employers value NNPC as a reliable organization that is fulfilling costly human resource needs, e.g. training, customer services, IT, etc.

- *Case-Specific Job Placement:*

NNPC employs a unique model of ‘targeted job development’ based on one-on-one case management that focuses on continuously moving clients along in the system toward job placement. Instead of the typical process by which a job developer compiles a selection of jobs from which clients must choose, this model works from an understanding of an individual’s needs, desires, and skills. The intake and job developer positions are combined into one to foster familiarity between the client and staff person. After an extensive orientation process, the staff person sits down with the client and they decide together which job to target. NNPC’s program includes a rigorous retention and follow-up process, based on check-ins at the 3,6,9, and 12 month intervals. These check-ins are used to explore opportunities for advancement, and to ask key questions about the client’s experiences in the workplace.

### *Workforce Development with Undocumented Immigrants*

NNPC works with a high number of undocumented workers (estimated at about 50% of job service clients), and has been able to create a reputation of confidence in the community that encourages participation. While NNPC cannot issue a formal reference to undocumented immigrants, they can coach these clients through the process, and direct them toward available, safe opportunities. Based on feedback from past clients, they have developed a database that records which employers inquire about legal status.

NNPC follows basic guidelines in their work with undocumented immigrants that create clarity in the relationship, and, ultimately, an important sense of trust:

1. Make certain that people *always* leave with something tangible, for instance, information, training, or a reference.
2. Always be very clear with undocumented immigrants about what to expect in terms of treatment, discrimination, etc. when they go into the job market, and make certain that clients know their rights.
3. Work to dispel any stigmas by modeling acceptance.

NNPC has also been intentional about adapting their programs to the transitory lifestyles of immigrants in the community. Many of the traditional gauges of success in workforce development and service programs, such as stability and continuity, do not appropriately account for many of the challenges that undocumented immigrants face (unorthodox work schedules, child care services, transportation problems, mistrust of public bureaucracies). To respond to this, NNPC has designed their program to accommodate their constituency while delivering on expectations to funders. Three particular practices are notable, in particular:

1. NNPC is intentional and clear in contract negotiations with funders. It is good practice to be careful and conservative in estimates of performance outcomes.
2. NNPC maintains two separate programming schedules: the first is the traditional ‘start/end schedule’ with regular meeting times and sessions. The second is a ‘come when you can’ schedule that emphasizes self-help resources, such as ESL and literacy software used in the computer lab, instructional workbooks, and special evening and weekend workshops.

3. NNPC emphasizes attainment of specific short-term outcomes, such as completion of 4-hour job workshops, skills competency, and job placement or advancement outcomes. This last strategy is based on the fact that all long term goals can be broken down into shorter term plans and outcomes. If the client is only present for a short amount of time, they realize some of the performance goals, which counts with funders.

### *Coalition-Building*

NNPC started the Coalition for Community Change with two other inner-city neighborhood organizations that are predominantly African American. This coalition has forced city government and other decision making bodies to acknowledge increased leverage. While they believe that their united voice is an expression of power, there is also an awareness that the city wants to transfer some of its service provision responsibilities and corresponding accountability to this coalition.

NNPC has also formed a successful partnership with the Urban Planning Department at the University of Texas, which has been helpful in introducing new models of development and, in particular, health care provision.

### **Successes and Outcomes**

NNPC's first campaigns were around health care in the school system. They were able to mobilize a core group of residents that leveraged resources for a health center in one of the neighborhood schools, Rufino Mendoza Elementary. After these successes, NNPC moved on to work on housing issues in the community, that led to \$1.2 million in model block funding. Because it is a historical neighborhood, there is a unique and beautiful housing stock, but very little income to maintain it. Eventually, this pushed NNPC to take on a comprehensive community development approach that focuses on housing, workforce development, and organizing/advocacy work around diverse issues, including winning Latino representation in formal political circles.

NNPC has successfully developed and managed a community one-stop that houses job placement services, a computer lab, ESL training, daycare, family planning, and other services. Their job service program successfully places hundreds of individuals each year, and has gained a reputation in the business community as a viable employment sourcing option.

### **Organizational infrastructure and Resources**

NNPC's board is composed of residents. The organization holds quarterly meetings for which they do extensive outreach. They conduct surveys to keep a pulse on what the community thinks are the pressing issues and form focus groups to advance the organization's work on those issues. This information is put together and formulated into an annual *Neighborhood Action Plan* which they pass by residents again for revision and approval. NNPC receives funding from several community foundations, as well as from government (city of Fort Worth, HUD) to pursue specific workforce development projects.

## **Primavera Works**

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### **Background and Issues Addressed**

Primavera Works is a program established by the Primavera Foundation in Tucson, Arizona. Primavera is a non-profit organization whose goal is addressing the root causes of homelessness and poverty through education and advocacy. Founded in 1982, they have established a range of services for the poor, including transitional housing for women, an emergency men's homeless shelter, a drop-in outreach center, a number of affordable and transitional housing units, employment services, and a homeownership assistance program. They also engage in a range of advocacy and education efforts, rooted in the belief that social and economic justice is the key to addressing root causes of poverty and homelessness.

Primavera established a temporary help agency in 1996, in part to place workers residing in Primavera shelters into employment and help them establish a stable work history and good work skills. The decision to establish the agency also came after years of pursuing advocacy-oriented measures to address the complaints of residents about the day labor industry in Tucson. They began by placing workers into jobs that primarily became available through short-term public contracts, but have since expanded to a wide range of private sector business as well. They also operate the County's Youthbuild program in partnership with Pima County, the Arizona Carpenter's Union, SER (GED preparation) and Primavera Construction Training. Primavera Works has grown to become roughly one-third of Primavera's \$2.5 million, 50-staff operation.

### **GOAL(S) OF PROGRAM/POLICY**

The most immediate goal of Primavera Works is simply to help homeless workers and day laborers connect with employers in the region. Their larger goal is to improve employment practices in the day labor industry in the region. By linking their employment services directly with their social services, they are able to provide a comprehensive range of services that can assist homeless workers in not just finding, but also keeping employment. By linking their work with day laborers with broader advocacy activities and coalition building, they also have had broader impacts on day labor employment.

### **STRATEGY AND PROGRAM APPROACH**

In their placement activities, Primavera Works aims to provide a number of specific services, which may seem like minor accomplishments, but in fact are wildly neglected in day labor hiring practices. These include: giving workers clear procedures for assignments; minimizing their waiting time in the morning prior to going on assignment; paying workers for every hour worked; making all mandatory payroll contributions, including workers' compensation at the appropriate insurance rate; paying them weekly rather than daily and charge no check-cashing fees; providing transportation to and

from job sites; providing safety equipment and basic safety training if necessary; and offering workers a free lunch and drink to take to the job site. This last benefit is an example of the advantage of being linked with a homeless shelter, and provides significant savings for workers, especially those who don't have access to their own kitchen to prepare their own lunch.

In 1998, a Charles Mott Initiative grant gave Primavera the opportunity to expand. Primavera focuses on placements in construction, janitorial, light manufacturing, data entry, landscaping and groundskeeping. Currently, 40 to 50 private sector businesses hire temporary workers through Primavera. On average, the agency places 50 workers per week into jobs for 20 to 25 hours per worker per week. According to Karen Uhlich, Former Executive Director of Primavera Works, one-third of the workers placed through their agency find permanent employment.

The strategy behind the creation of the non-profit temporary agency was based on two beliefs. First, there will continue to be a role for day labor, despite the need for advocacy, to address the abusive practices of many day labor agencies. Second, Primavera believes they can compete with for-profit firms, while providing slightly higher wages and providing a higher quality service (in part by providing transportation, and other assistance, to their day laborers). Ideally, they hope to also push for-profit day labor agencies to raise their standards in order to remain competitive. By following a dual-strategy approach, Primavera is able to provide training and support for workers in their target population of homeless and low-income, as well as serving as a model employer supplying contingent workers for a range of occupations. Workers in those occupations benefit from improved working conditions and benefits, and Primavera's approach seeks to improve conditions for all of the contingent workers in the area.

Primavera Works allows workers to enroll directly off the streets, even if they have serious unresolved issues related to employment. By serving as an improved link to work, they have found that they could be more effective in engaging in efforts to address other issues (e.g. alcoholism, unresolved child support, etc.). They also offer flexible work hours to abide by maximum allowable hours for individuals on SSI, or minimum hours required for certain welfare-to-work participants.

#### ▪ ***Education/Training***

Primavera Works runs Primavera Construction Training, which provides marketable construction skills as part of an on-the-job training program run in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation. It is a two-year, 40-hour a week training program, with a starting wage of \$6.00, designed for homeless men and women. Skilled foremen teach framing, drywall, painting and finished carpentry, while Primavera provides case management services if needed, referring people to assistance for housing, food, clothing, mental and physical health services.

#### ▪ ***Organizing and Advocacy***

In their efforts to transform the Day Labor industry, Primavera has tried to mobilize support from both the day labor workers themselves and with business customers, including construction, landscape, warehouse, hotel/restaurants and light manufacturing companies. Primavera does not demand of employers a commitment to hire workers into full-time work. Instead, their goal is to build themselves as a first-source provider, by sending workers who are clearly ready and fully supported. Thus, their goal is to have employers focus on performance and attitude, rather than a

person's status as undocumented, or ex-offender. They work to educate employers about misguided impressions they may have about using intermediaries (e.g. using intermediaries does not shield third-party employers from liability from unfair labor practices, workers compensation, unemployment claims, etc.)

Primavera Works was also involved in a successful effort to push for day labor legislation at a state-wide level. In July 2000, new legislation was passed in Arizona regulating the activities of day labor service agencies. This legislation requires all day labor agencies to: compensate day laborers for work performed in a commonly negotiated instrument or in cash without discount; provide itemized written statements showing in detail any deductions in wages; ensure that those deductions do not bring day laborer's pay below federal minimum wage levels; not restrict the right of a day laborer to accept a permanent position with any third party employer.

Primavera Works also helped support the Southwest Center for Economic Integrity (SCEI), and other groups working with Day Laborers, in a lawsuit filed by the Arizona Attorney General's office against Labor Ready, one of the most prominent day labor employers in the country. Labor Ready had been charging day laborers up to \$1.99 to receive their pay in cash at the end of the day, in contravention of the new regulations. This amounted to as much as \$10,000 a month that Labor Ready was extracting from day laborers in Arizona every month. In February 2004, a settlement was reached requiring Labor Ready to refund all fees they charged. Any uncollected fees, up to a total of \$150,000, was to be split between four different organizations working with day laborers, including Primavera Works and SCEI.

## **SUCSESSES AND OUTCOMES**

Primavera overall serves roughly 900 people each year, with roughly 350 finding work through their employment services program. Their success in advocating for day labor regulations, and in pushing for the lawsuit against Labor Ready, also demonstrate important achievement of the organization.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES**

Primavera Services is a significantly large organization—it had total revenue in 2002/3 of more than \$4 million. At least two-thirds of the organizations efforts are devoted to their emergency shelter, transitional and affordable housing, and relief and referral services. In that year, 743 people were enrolled in Primavera Works programs, with 27 enrolled in the 2-year Construction Training Program.

# **Restaurant Opportunities Center**

**New York City, New York**

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## **Background and Issues Addressed**

ROC-NY is an industry-specific workers center founded to support the 300 mostly immigrant survivors that became unemployed when the upscale Windows on the World restaurant collapsed with the World Trade Center, killing 73 workers. The post-9-11 crisis in the tourism and restaurant industry created a severe need for services and aggravated the power imbalance between workers and owners. With initial emergency funds, and subsequent foundation funding, ROC-NY has been able to fill the services gap and build much-needed leverage to generate accountability in an increasingly consolidated industry.

ROC-NY deploys a two-tiered strategy that aims to reform the restaurant industry in New York City: as they work to empower workers at the grassroots level, they are also busily constructing the first cooperatively-owned restaurant in Manhattan. Ownership of a successful ‘tablecloth restaurant’ promises to establish ROC-NY’s voice at the entrepreneurial table and, simultaneously, lends an opportunity to illustrate the feasibility of paying fair wages, providing benefits, and turning a profit.

Some 35 languages are spoken within the membership base, however the Latino constituency is largest at around 70%. While diversity does present some complexity in communication and cultural tension, it is something that the organization wears with pride and believes that it is representative of the true diversity within the industry.

## **Mission and Goals**

The Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY) is dedicated to winning improved conditions for restaurant workers and raising public recognition of restaurant workers’ contributions to the city. ROC-NY advances toward this goal by maintaining five simultaneous programs: policy advocacy, organizing, research, education, and training.

## **Strategy and Program Approach**

### *Community Organizing*

ROC-NY is built on a strong foundation of community organizing—prioritizing this aspect of their work over their initial mandate for job placement and other service provision, which have become more peripheral side-activities. Distinct from the union, ROC-NY has been able to organize in small shops, successfully winning back wages, hiring agreements, and other concessions from major

industry entrepreneurs in the city. They have already chalked up several victories, starting with a successful campaign to force former owner of Windows on the World to hire 32 workers displaced after 9/11 at his new upscale restaurant. In all, ROC-NY has forced several renowned restaurant entrepreneurs to fork out hundreds of thousands of dollars in back wages and to post notices in the workplace explaining workers' right to organize.

ROC-NY employs two staff organizers that have been focused on meeting recruitment goals. Most of their outreach takes place on the 'work-to-home path', primarily on the subways during shift changes, where they make their initial approach, introduce ROC-NY, offer some materials, and invite them to a meeting. The cooperative project has served as a major recruitment tool as well, attracting workers who are interested in the possibility of becoming part owners of a restaurant enterprise, and of learning new skills.

ROC-NY has readily used direct action techniques, which have drawn much attention from local media hungry for 9-11 survivor stories. They employ an "11 steps to protest" model that starts when a worker brings a complaint to the organization, and includes a collaborative outreach process spearheaded by workers themselves and supported by ROC-NY's staff organizers.

#### *Service Provision*

ROC-NY made the early decision to de-emphasize service provision and job placement. The services that are provided help to attract and maintain the interest of members, and stimulate involvement in other projects that ROC-NY is pursuing. Because ROC-NY functions as a workers center, members tend to hang out in the space to take advantage of the services, and simultaneously build a culture of solidarity.

As an improvised jobs program, they conduct what amounts to a job swap-meet: each member is responsible for bringing in two job announcements which they have checked out to insure that they are quality jobs. The members then explain what they have found and trade information with others that are looking for work. In this way, job searchers can pick the job that best suits their interest, needs, and skill set. Currently, ROC-NY is working on a database to track positive and negative experiences with various employers. As of June, 2004 they have successfully placed over 200 members using this method.

Despite ROC-NY's decision to focus on organizing instead of services, they have been able to put together a strong matrix of services by partnering with organizations and educational institutions in the area. ROC-NY's office space is housed in a junior college, and they share many of the college's resources, such as their classrooms and computer lab. They partner with local organizations and schools to provide services: Volunteers teach info tech skills; ESL is taught by members and volunteer students; there are new bike safety classes for delivery employees; Cooking and bartending classes are provided at a nearby restaurant, where an owner has agreed to let ROC-NY use the space for skill-building classes.



### *Enterprise Development*

ROC-NY's focus on organizing and direct action dovetails with their cooperative project. While protest tactics are an effort to reform the industry from the bottom-up, building grassroots power to hold owners accountable for their labor practices, ROC-NY views the cooperative as a point of entry at the top of the industry. As owners, members have voice and leverage that they would not otherwise attain. Because they are building a tablecloth restaurant, they can open a dialogue amongst the chief powerbrokers in the industry. One of the principal objectives in the cooperative project is to illustrate that restaurants can pay workers a living wage, provide health care, and still turn a solid profit.

ROC-NY holds weekly meetings with future cooperative owners to make decisions and move the process forward. Workers will provide 20% of the financing for the cooperative, which will come by way of sweat equity, earned at \$50/hour, which buys out a portion of the share owned by their main investor, an Italian consortium of food cooperatives that is making its first venture into the U.S. market with the ROC-NY cooperative. Additional funding comes from September 11<sup>th</sup> grants and low-interest loans, private social venture investors, and the landlord they will be renting from, who has contributed close to \$500,000. ROC-NY has been able to make a convincing case to potential investors, built on the professionalism of their proposal, the validity of a cooperative model that procures high quality and productivity stemming from greater accountability and a lower turnover amongst workers, and the high visibility and huge media splash upon opening, which is the result of the media's running coverage of a September 11<sup>th</sup> survivor story. ROC-NY has chosen a high-value location for the cooperative that is a popular tourist destination. The restaurant will sit in between two of the most popular upscale restaurants in the city. ROC-NY organizers feel that this will provide a 'halo effect' in which businesses in the area feed off of the success of one another.

ROC-NY has hired a project manager to coordinate the development of Manhattan's first cooperatively owned restaurant. This individual comes with a business background coupled with experience working in both government and the non-profit sector. To complement his expertise, ROC-NY has put together a comprehensive team of pro-bono professional support for the cooperative project that includes: a food and wine advisory panel, an architect and designer, business and financial advisors, legal advisors, a labor relations specialist, and a real estate advisor.

### *Education/Training*

ROC-NY maintains an 8-session popular education program geared toward leadership development, and raising political consciousness amongst members. Enrollment and completion of three sessions is required before members can take advantage of the services that ROC-NY provides. Classes include topics such as organizing methods, immigration/immigrant rights, globalization, occupational health and safety, restaurant industry, etc.

ROC-NY is also intentional about designing weekly membership and cooperative planning meetings as popular education sessions. While much of the time is spent on logistics and planning, the meetings are also used to prompt discussion around how each topic fits into ROC-NY's ambitious mission of organizing every unorganized restaurant worker in the city.

### *Network/Coalition Building*

ROC-NY has established a successful research relationship with the HERE local, universities, research institutions, and others. A coalition of 20 organizations is currently undertaking a comprehensive Restaurant Industry Analysis, that helps to identify strategic targets for organizing drives. Initial findings show that New York has 12,500 restaurants employing over 150,000 people. Some 5,790 "full-service restaurants" employ 81,304 workers and pay out \$1.7 billion in wages per year. Very few of these restaurants employ over 100 workers, and are thus passed over by the HERE local. This research collaboration helps to divvy up the labor of organizing, and insures that ROC-NY fills the union's shoes in the smaller restaurants.

In addition to this power analysis and mapping exercise, ROC-NY also played a major role in conducting an industry-wide worker survey. ROC-NY and the Urban Justice Center collectively trained restaurant worker members of ROC-NY and Andolan, a South Asian workers' rights organization, to follow their fellow workers home on subways after the night shift, conduct surveys with them, and tell them about ROC-NY. Over 500 surveys were collected.

Beyond research, ROC-NY does not work actively with many organizations in New York City. However, they have been able to give presentations at other worker centers that alert restaurant workers to the specific services and benefits of ROC-NY.

### *Advocacy/Electoral*

ROC-NY has formed a policy committee within the organization that is composed entirely of restaurant workers. They won their first significant victory in Summer 2004, leading a drive to include tipped restaurant workers in a New York state minimum wage increase. As many of ROC-NY's members lived in State Senator Mendez's (one of the sponsors of the bill) district, the organization was able to meet with her several times, organize press conferences outside her office, and hold an action that brought out over 300 workers. As a result, Senator Mendez, initially reluctant to include tipped workers in the bill, agreed to do so. The committee also traveled to the state capital several times and met repeatedly with several senators, successfully garnering support for the bill and inclusion of tipped workers.

The ROC-NY policy committee has also successfully advocated for the introduction of legislation at the state level that would strip restaurants of their operating licenses if they violate a core set of health and safety codes or wage laws. The recent hire of a policy organizer promises to build ROC-NY's role in legislative circles.

### **Successes and Outcomes**

ROC-NY has served as a cutting-edge alternative to the HERE local, which has barely achieved a 1% density in the industry in New York City (about 1500 organized workers). In its first two years of organizing, ROC-NY has built a membership approaching 1000 workers, which is partially a result of the crisis in tourism after 9-11 that left an estimated 13,000 without jobs. Their direct action tactics have won several hundred thousand dollars in back wages, and have built up the threat of direct action in the industry which works to curb labor code violations. ROC-NY has also become a significant player in both policy circles, successfully advocating for worker-friendly

legislation at the state level, and amongst entrepreneurs, as it prepares to open the first cooperatively-owned table cloth restaurant in the city.

### **Organizational infrastructure and Resources**

ROC-NY currently maintains an executive and assistant director, two full-time community organizers, a policy organizer, a cooperative project manager, and an office staff person. Saru Jayaraman and Fekkak Mamdouh provide an effective mixture of skills and background: Saru is a Harvard-educated lawyer with extensive experience working in the non-profit sector, and Fekkak was an active leader within the Windows on the World staff who has demonstrated substantial organizing skills. ROC-NY's board of directors is composed of 10 restaurant workers.

ROC-NY received substantial start-up funds as a result of September 11<sup>th</sup> grants provided by the government and HERE Local 100. One of the current challenges for the organization is to identify foundation and private funding as the September 11<sup>th</sup> funding closes out.

## **Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (WAGES)**

2647 International Blvd. Suite 205

Oakland, CA 94601

[www.wagescooperatives.org](http://www.wagescooperatives.org)

(510) 532-5465

**Contact Person: Hilary Abell**

### **Background and Issues Addressed**

The mission of **WAGES** is to promote the social and economic empowerment of low-income women through cooperative business ownership. Their unique strategy is to develop eco-friendly housecleaning companies that provide stable, safe and dignified work for their worker-owners while protecting the environment in which we live. Members strive for economic independence through cooperative business ownership. The cooperatives are structured as limited liability corporations (LLCs) which protects owners' assets and allows them to work legally as partners in an LLC. The cooperative members are Latina immigrants, many of whom do not have formal education. In addition to sustainable and equitable work opportunities, the non-profit offers educational and other capacity building support to its members.

The organization was founded in 1995; between 1995 and 1997, organizers began by assisting women to identify possible businesses. They decided to start an environmentally sound house cleaning business and a retail party store. By 1998, they began the process of replicating the cleaning cooperatives. WAGES operated from 1995-2001 in Mountain View and then expanded to Oakland and Redwood City in 2001. The three cooperatives are called: Emma's Eco-Clean Redwood City (opened with 5 women in 1999 and has since expanded to 17 worker owners), Eco-Care Housecleaning (Morgan Hill, opened with 9 women in 2001 and now has 12 members) and Natural Home Cleaning Professionals (Oakland, opened 2003).

As worker-owners, women who may have previously been in low-paid, insecure, isolated, and unhealthy jobs now work in a safe environment, where they have educational opportunities and participate in decision making. The cooperative model brings women together, to pool their resources and skills, while also receiving technical support from the non-profit.

### **Strategy and Program Approach**

WAGES' primary goals are business development and stability that provide living wages and healthy working conditions. They strive for living wage conditions (worker-owners receive \$11-15 in profit distributions for each hour worked) where the cooperative business profits belong to the cleaners themselves. In this industry, women often work alone in private homes in what can be an isolated environment. This kind of isolation is not usually conducive to organizing for improved workplace conditions or for sharing resources. In addition, cleaning commonly exposes women to potent chemicals that may be harmful to them over time. For these and other reasons, WAGES has found a strong niche in the industry for its members and created a more stable and healthy work environment.

As the mission statement indicates, the non-profit also encourages cooperative members to participate fully in the organization. Related goals are building self-esteem, mutual support and community awareness. The non-profit recognizes the need for continued training so that the worker owners have a working knowledge of all aspects of the business. They also emphasize the importance of strong communication skills for maintaining the cooperatives. They have anticipated the kind of support the cooperatives need to succeed which includes: recruiting, technical and managerial assistance and /education/training.

### *Business Development*

The overall idea behind WAGES is to “*formalize the informal economy.*”<sup>15</sup> In other words, the cleaning sector has historically been informal, leaving its workers more vulnerable perhaps than some other industries. By providing a formal LLC structure and bringing the worker owners together, WAGES has in effect secured a more stable situation. The liability of a cooperative is less than an individual business owner, however, beyond that advantage WAGES is committed to empowering its members and pooling resources—for these reasons they have chosen a cooperative versus a micro-enterprise model.

The three existing cooperatives provide environmentally or eco-friendly housecleaning services in the Bay Area, a relatively lucrative niche for this industry. Worker-owners are highly motivated by having a decent paying job. However, being a part of the cooperative requires a big commitment from the women and their families, therefore potential worker owners must have plenty of information beforehand on the expectations of the position. The strategy for motivating women to become involved is described as having to be “both realistic *and* inspiring.”<sup>16</sup>

They are positioning themselves to be a leader in the industry by trade marking their environmental techniques about 2 years ago. These standards set a high bar, more on the environmental side than the labor side, though they are concerned with both aspects of the work place. By having brand identity it helps them define a more comprehensive model. In the future, they hope to form an association of eco friendly co-ops to formalize the relationships between the co-ops. There is potential for joint marketing and training, as well as insurance and product purchasing which could bring direct cost benefits. They are considering letting other groups into the association using a social screen to ensure a continued social justice approach. They could also sell licensing to other groups to use WAGES trademark to generate some “earned income” for WAGES.

### *Program Support*

WAGES’ four program areas are:

- Education  
Education and training is a large part of what WAGES offers to its members. There is intensive training even before a business is opened. Most of the women were unemployed before they came to WAGES and some have limited experience cleaning. WAGES trains on cleaning techniques, the business side, and other skills needed to be part of a cooperative.

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<sup>15</sup> June 23, 2004 conversation with Hilary Abell

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

Potential members must attend three meetings before being invited to join the training program. Also, they have a three month training for starting up and developing a new cooperative, and new members for an established cooperative train for one to two months.

- **Governance Training**  
WAGES provides intensive Board development for maintaining strong governance and support for the co-ops. Originally the cooperatives were managed by the worker owner Boards. In 2002 they made changes to the original model that changed the structure of the cooperatives from being totally collective and self managed to having managers and administrative support. They found this model to be more effective, drawing upon the expertise of the staff without taking away fundamental control from the worker owners.
- **Management Services**  
Each co-op contracts with a professional manager who oversees operations, assists with training and coordinates business growth. While worker owners do not need to know all the details of financial and other management information, they need to fully understand the membership agreement that they sign. They use popular education techniques and make summary documents for accessibility.
- **Technical assistance**  
In addition to educational programming, the staff provides technical support in areas like dealing with legal structures, tax preparation, conflict resolution, evaluation, and strategic planning. This assistance is part of WAGES' internal staff capacity.

### *Building Solidarity*

While the organization is not a direct service provider (aside from its educational programming) or an organizing or advocacy based group, it does seek the support of allies to help with recruiting and supporting cooperative members and support parts of the coop development process. Community based organizations have helped them with recruitment, and have even served as the base from which a cooperative was founded. For example, in Morgan Hill the Learning and Loving Center (which provides ESL and computer classes to immigrants) encouraged WAGES to work with their program participants and supported the start-up and development of Eco-Care. A staff person from Mujeres Unidas provided key support for Natural Home Cleaning by serving as a “community representative” on its Board of Directors. WAGES likes to work with an existing organization that can provide space, logistical support, and access to interested women. The referrals are mutually beneficial to both organizations. Other external assistance has been the good media coverage they have gotten, in particular TV news stories, which generated hundreds phone calls from interested women. It should be noted that only a small group of those that called through the TV coverage actually participate due to the high level of commitment needed. Other important allies have been the lenders for community development in the Bay Area. Finally, of course the solidarity within the cooperatives is a critical ingredient for success.

### **Successes and Outcomes**

WAGES and its worker owner collaborators have created three thriving cooperative businesses that currently provide work for roughly 30 women. They provide hundreds of

hours of training and have gained recognition and presented their model throughout the country. They have built a network of cooperatives for mutual support and leadership training and are launching a formal Peer Leadership Program with all three coops this spring. In 1999, they were granted the Environmental Business Award Social Equity for Sustainability by the Peninsula Conservation Center foundation.<sup>17</sup> They have won several awards for non profit innovation and sustainable business.

Key to their success begins with keeping the main goal simple and clear. The organization is able to articulate its purpose and its successes in a concrete and compelling way that has the potential to be a model for other groups around the country that are interested in developing cooperatives in immigrant and other low-income communities. WAGES organizers have found that democratic workplaces require more time but are well worth it. There is the potential for internal struggles between the non-profit WAGES and the cooperative. To avoid these kinds of conflicts, there must be a lot of clarity and communication. Dealing with grievances differs in each cooperative. Each one has its own process of going to the Board or the manager to resolve issues. Guidelines and policies are worked out ahead of time.

According to the Executive Director, there is a lot of healthy mistrust: women ask “is this too good to be true?” WAGES needs to provide information on the expectations and downsides as well as the benefits of being a worker owner. It is important that the women’s families also have access to learn about the business. Sometimes husbands question women working outside the house because they do not want their wives to be taken advantage of or abused, or the husbands may feel threatened by their wives developing other support networks or simply prefer more traditional gender roles. They have found that having family support is very essential for the women.

What ties the women together is a good sense of mutual purpose. This commonality transcends the class or race differences that there may be between staff and worker members. The group is more united around women’s rights more than race or class. Part of their programming includes sensitivity training for working with each other and clients. In the future they may pursue a learning exchange with the People’s Grocery, a mostly African American community in West Oakland, who work on food and sustainability and urban farming.

Once in a cooperative, there is ongoing training which is viewed as being critical to cultivating good communication and constructive criticism. Interestingly, there is not a strong correlation between those worker owners with more cleaning experience and being better prepared for the job. They have found that caring about the work, being energetic and detail-oriented, being a team player, and being motivated and responsible is more important than paid cleaning experience to being a successful worker owner.

## **Organizational infrastructure and Resources**

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<sup>17</sup> 2000 Annual Report on website: <http://www.wagescooperatives.org>

Most of the staff of WAGES are relatively new (less than three years) with one trainer who has been on staff much longer (6 years on staff, a co-op member/program participant and intern before that) and there has been a relatively high rate of staff turnover. There is an Executive Director, a program Director, one person who does administration and fund development, and a trainer. In addition, each co-op contracts with a general manager who is a member of WAGES staff.<sup>18</sup> With the structural changes, they had to be very clear on defining the manager's roles with operations, while maintaining the worker-owner decision making. The newest cooperative is trying a hybrid Board of Directors (with worker owners and allies) to provide mentoring and expertise on business development. They hope that this new model will enable larger size cooperatives since they have found that at about 12-15 members, a co-op it maxes out.

The co-ops are financed first by a small business loan of about \$15-25,000 from Lenders for Community Development, a consortium of community development banks in San Jose. The worker owners are encouraged from the beginning to do fund raising efforts like garage and food sales to offset the cost of the loan. Worker owners pay a small fee to join the co-op (\$400). Their sales generate benefits for the worker owners (above their hourly earnings) which include: mileage and laundry reimbursements, access to personal loans through the business, and the use of less toxic substances at no personal costs. Once the business has been open a while, other benefits are achievable like health insurance which in place at one of the coops, paid time off, and paid training and meeting time. The added benefits of economic security and professional development are invaluable.

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<sup>18</sup> Staffing as of June, 2004.



# **The Workplace Project**

**Hempstead, New York**

**Nadia Marin-Molina, Executive Director; 516-565-5377**

## **Background and Issues Addressed**

The Workplace Project, based in Hempstead, New York, is a workers center dedicated to organizing Latino day laborers. Founded as a project of Carecen, a service-oriented non-profit working with Latino immigrants, the Workplace Project's initial mandate was to provide legal services to Carecen's clients in the area. As staff identified a pattern in the issues that the workers were facing—unpaid wages, injuries on the job, discrimination, and unsubstantiated dismissal—they understood that while the Workplace Project could provide legal services on a case-by-case basis, they were not working toward systemic change. As a result, the organization decided to separate from Carecen in 1994, two years after its founding, and has settled on direct organizing as a foundation for their work.

## **Mission and Goals**

Their principal struggle has been to build the capacity of day laborers to defend their rights, and to push government to establish workers centers where there are concentrations of day laborers in the region. Long Island, where Hempstead is located, has been identified as the most segregated suburb in the country, and has seen a sharp increase in the Latino population in recent years. While the debate over day laborers has been sharp around the country, it has been particularly vicious here. The controversy spiked when two day laborers were kidnapped and severely beaten in Farmingville in 2000.

Even though the Workplace Project has been able to dig its trenches in this volatile landscape by organizing, they continue to play a service provision role, as well. Their programming has become a blend of service provision, popular education, and organizing that is based in strong leadership development. They take a unique collectivist approach to training and services which has helped to build a culture of empowerment and solidarity not only within the organization, but within the community, as well.

## **Strategy and Program Approach**

### *Community Organizing*

In the small village of Freeport, where the Workplace Project has been successful in establishing a center, organizers were given only a lukewarm welcome when they first approached workers. Several months later, however, police began to crack down on the day laborers for standing on street corners where contractors would pick them up. The workers promptly contacted the Workplace Project. Through a combination of coalition building and door-to-door efforts to increase support for a workers center, they persuaded local government to endorse and provide funding for a center. The Freeport mayor, who was initially against the construction of the center,

agreed to support it and use funding earmarked for community development. To provide services at the center, the mayor called on Catholic Charities.

Beyond the Freeport victory, the Workplace Project is aiming to win the establishment of as many as six centers in the region. These campaigns are slow and complex, and require not only strong worker organizing, but piecing together a community support network, as well. One of the obstacles in winning workers centers is locating them. While the day laborer issue is very heated, and can polarize a community, even allies demonstrate an ambivalent attitude. The Workplace Project has found that amongst the support network they build in a community, most will advocate for a center so long as it is distant from their own neighborhoods.

There is an ongoing debate within the Workplace Project about whether to provide services directly. Many within the Workplace Project believe that it would be best for them to administer at least one center because it would help to expand their base of workers, and create more proximity and confidence with their base. Additionally, some staff members believe that by becoming a service provider it may help lend legitimacy to their work in legislative circles. While there is concern about the drain on resources that this would entail, they also recognize that when other organizations have control over the center, it can limit the potential as a site for organizing. At the Freeport site, for instance, it has been a challenge to negotiate access with the organization that is contracted to provide services.

### *Education and Training*

The Workplace Project runs an eight week workers' rights course, which takes place once a week for two hours per session. The course covers labor and immigration history, basic workers' rights, and broader issues such as the global economy. Additionally, there are components of the course that focus on training workers how to organize, including a session that is devoted to organizing an actual action.

Curriculum on organizing is included because there is a keen awareness within the organization of the legal shortcomings in worker protections. While facilitators are careful to inform their students about their legal rights, they find that it can be depressing for workers to learn about the limitations of civil rights and labor rights law. The organizing topic is designed to offer hope and to be realistic about the need for change. Even though workers may not become organizers immediately, the organization views this as a means to expanding workers' vision beyond the parameters of the law as it currently exists, and helps to create an acceptance and support of organizing as a valid and viable means to social change. And, on a practical level, this piece of the workers' rights course helps to orient workers and engage them in the Workplace Project's programs.

In line with popular education methodology, most of the curriculum is couched in the experiences of the workers taking the course, or of past and present campaigns. Oftentimes, facilitators will bring workers in to give a first-hand account of how the topic played out in their own lives. This helps to contextualize the material, and also give a living example of empowerment that helps to motivate those taking the class.

Broader topics like immigration and the global perspective are included to give workers a common perspective and open people's minds to larger problems and movement-building. It is also an opportunity to point to how rights were won historically by immigrants and civil society.

## *Service Provision*

The Workplace Project decided to tie this eight-week course to the legal services they offer. As many workers initially approach the organization looking to recoup unpaid wages, the decision was made to require that workers enroll in the course. Recently, they have scaled up the requirements to require that workers take the course and provide 10 hours of service to the organization. These standards work towards an emerging communal culture within the organization that is seen throughout the service provision, education, and organizing.

Another aspect of this new approach is to move away from individual legal consultations by requiring that workers in need of the Workplace Project's legal services organize groups to receive the consultation together in a workshop setting. While this approach is a bit more efficient, the primary motivation for the change was to take the emphasis away from individual problems, and instead to cultivate a collective mentality. The staff has learned that this is a counter-cultural effort which has proven to be more difficult than expected. However, this is valued within the organization as a key mechanism for building leverage. Nadia Marin-Molina, WP's executive director, described the challenge and potential of this approach,

*Our whole society looks at problems from a very individual perspective. Most of the time when someone first comes to the organization, they are coming to us because they have heard that we can help them solve their problem. They come in and say: "Hi, I need an attorney that can help me fix this." And we have to change their way of thinking. We see the workshops as the first step in that direction. What we point out in the workshop is that there are ten people here, and each one of you have a different employer and problem, but next week ten more are going to come in with similar problems, and the week after that, more are going to come with similar problems. It's not just you and your individual situation, it's that the employers know that they can get away with this, and they do it again, and again, and again. The idea of the workshop is to re-orient from an individual perspective to a group perspective, and to stop employers from doing this. And it teaches people not to depend on staff, but instead to depend on each other.*

Through these group consultations, the Workplace Project identifies people that can serve on issue-specific committees related to the topic of the workshop. For instance, if someone receives a social security no-match and brings a group together to learn about their rights in this scenario, the individual might be asked to join a committee to advance the Workplace Project's position on social security no-matches.

The philosophy behind these committees is to develop a support network, where workers in different workplaces can cross-fertilize and strategize together. The individuals that belong to committees are nurtured as members of the organization that conduct outreach activities. As workers gain an expertise around certain issues, they work to inform other workers through site-specific presentations at churches, soccer fields, ESL classrooms, etc. One of the main challenges of the group approach is that the Workplace Project also needs to be sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of individual problems. According to Marin-Molina, finding that balance has been a slow and touchy process.

## ***Organizational Infrastructure***

The Workplace project is currently staffed by six individuals, four of which are organizers working

either in specific industries or geographic areas. The Board of Directors is composed of nine members and two alternates, all of whom are members of the organization and are elected to the board by other immigrant workers. The Board of Directors holds monthly meetings and is in charge of broad policy decisions for the organization, fundraising and financial planning. The members participate in decision making largely through the committees.

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