The Unacceptable Immigration Wait

BY: NELSON CARRASQUILLO AND JESSICA CULLEY

For more years than is acceptable, CATA and its members have been advocating for fair and comprehensive immigration reform. This year, the topic of immigration has been in news, but not for any reason that might give any hope to undocumented migrants living in the United States.

In the beginning of May, a leak out of the Department of Homeland Security brought news alerting the community to the probability of a new round of immigration enforcement on recently arrived Central American women and children. These are women and children who fled violence and poverty and gave themselves up voluntarily at the border into the hands of Customs and Border Patrol.

On June 23, 2016, the Supreme Court announced that they could not come to a decision on the legality of President Obama’s executive actions that would have given deportation relief and work permits to qualifying undocumented parents of citizen children and students. The 8 judges deadlocked in a tie, 4 in favor and 4 against. Unable to make a decision, the lower court decision to suspend the programs remains in effect.

So this is where the community finds itself, stuck, once again, because no one can agree. None of the potential presidential nominees are seriously talking about immigration. Trump claims he will build a wall and get Mexico to pay for it. Hillary Clinton has defended the Obama administration’s use of the detention

Continued on page 3...

Inside This Issue:

Page 2: RadioCATA Thrives
Page 3: Waiting for Immigration Reform
Page 4-5: Herbal Medicine Initiative
Page 6: Reflection from CATA Intern
Page 7: 2016 Fall Fundraising Campaign
Page 8: Support CATA’s Work
RadioCATA Continues to Thrive

BY: MEGHAN HURLEY, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

In November of 2015, CATA officially launched RadioCATA, its own Spanish-language non-commercial low-power FM radio station, in Bridgeton, NJ. The radio station began as a way to reach out to the immigrant community and engage them with CATA’s message of organizing to fight for the rights they deserve. CATA members see the radio station as a crucial communication tool to build unity among Latinos as they struggle for justice in their workplaces and communities.

CATA members worked hard for more than a year to fundraise and plan in order to get the station up and running this past November. They participated in all aspects of the station construction, from soldering the cables together to climbing the roof to install the antenna. The station plays on 102.5 FM in Bridgeton, NJ and is streaming online for the rest of the world to listen to at www.radiocata.com.

Through the radio station, we provide news reports and information on issues concerning the migrant community including immigration, workers’ rights, and food justice, as well as informing people of CATA’s meetings, trainings, workshops, and other activities, and local community announcements. A space has been created to talk about questions and concerns that members have in their workplaces and communities. There is also music and live programming from local DJs.

In March of this year, CATA started producing a weekly hour-long program on current events and situations facing the community. The program is called “Si Se Puede” and has featured information on diabetes, sexual harassment, nutrition, pesticide protection, workplace health and safety, organic agriculture, and so much more. You can listen to all of the episodes (in Spanish) at www.radiocata.com.

Since its first broadcast, RadioCATA has grown into a place of entertainment, education, and empowerment for its listeners. Many listeners have sought out support from CATA and come to meetings and activities, showing that the message is reaching new people and helping to grow the organization.
of minors and families to “send a message” to others about the futility of trying to flee violence and poverty. Bernie Sanders stands apart by promoting a message of comprehensive immigration reform and a rejection of the deportation policies of the current administration, but he is no longer in the running.

There are an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States currently. There are members of CATA who have been in the United States, separated from their families, for more than 10 years because of the stubborn reluctance of our political representatives to face reality and enact immigration reform. Perhaps it is too generous to say that it is because of a reluctance to face reality. Perhaps the truth is closer to keeping the status quo of our current system of employment and our politicians relying on the continued availability of a cheap, docile, and vulnerable labor force.

The formal positions of many of the biggest employer associations – The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, The American Farm Bureau Federation, and others support comprehensive immigration reform, but also want to see the implementation of massive employer-controlled temporary visa programs, like the H-2A guestworker program that currently exists for the agricultural industry.

The guestworker programs we have today in the U.S. – H-2A, H-2B, J-1 – are programs based purely upon the consideration of an employer’s need for workers. How many workers does he need? For how long? Visas are then given for that period of time (always less than a year) and that visa that is only valid for employment with a specific employer. If the employer is not satisfied with the worker, under the current regulations they can rescind the contract and the worker has to return to their home country immediately. Workers are not allowed to travel with their families. The Southern Poverty Law Center published a report on H-2A guestworkers in 2013 aptly named, “Close to Slavery.”

The deferred action program currently being considered by the Supreme Court is portrayed positively with photos of happy families and talk of family reunification. But the reality is that deferred action is not an immigration status. It is simply a temporary protection from deportation. Individuals can be work authorized, but must apply (and pay) for the ability to leave the country to visit their home countries. Their work authorization does not create any path to residency or citizenship and does not allow workers to petition for family members left behind. While it is beneficial for workers to have even a temporary protection, we believe it is yet another program designed for the benefit of employers who continue to ask for stronger work verification programs as they also advocate for guestworkers.

In recent conversations with our members, workers have indicated that they no longer have the expectation that our political system will recognize them, will see the contributions they have made in their workplaces, in our communities. They recognize that their lives will continue to be tainted by insecurity.

Immigration policy should not be based on fear and intolerance, but rather on the fulfillment of people’s basic human rights and recognizing the dignity of all people. The lack of a comprehensive immigration reform is infuriating and the migrant community is tired of hearing the same rejection time and time again. They are tired of waiting.
CATA’s New Herbal Medicine Initiative

By: Kathia Ramirez, Organizer

On April 3rd 2016, a cold and windy day, members and participants of CATA’s Food Justice Program walked through Parvin State Park in Elmer, NJ identifying native plants and their medicinal properties. This activity is just one part of a new initiative at CATA to learn and share knowledge about herbal medicine. CATA has been working closely with Richard Mandelbaum, a clinical herbalist, professor and former CATA employee, to develop activities on native plants, herbal medicine, and natural remedies involving his students and CATA members.

The majority of CATA members are undocumented immigrants who do not have access to reliable health insurance that can cover their medical needs. There are some conventional healthcare resources available to them through community health care clinics, but they are limited. Most medicine prescribed is expensive and many avoid going because the process is too complicated.

Through the program on herbal medicine that CATA is developing, participants are learning about local wild plants and their uses and putting their knowledge into practice. This series of events on herbal medicine are a component of CATA’s Food Justice Program. The Food Justice Program is an initiative that promotes the need for pesticide and chemical free food and more just and fair food system, especially for food workers.

For the first herbal medicine activity, which took place last year in November, Richard and his students met with CATA members and held an exchange on traditional herbal medicine. During this exchange, people shared different recipes they knew from their home countries on how to treat a headache, stomach flu, joint pain and other ailments. The students were able to share other treatments and recipes with local herbs that can even be found in one’s own backyard. The students also did...
demonstrations on how to make a tea using native plants from New Jersey, medicinal syrup for fighting a cold virus, and a moisturizer for dry skin.

As a follow up, people were interested in learning more about local wild herbs and plants that they can use since the majority of what they used back in their countries of origin – most participants are from Mexico and Guatemala – cannot be found in New Jersey.

During the activity on April 3rd in Parvin State Park, participants spent the morning identifying wild plants that can be used to heal and treat common illnesses. They learned that the roots from dandelions can be used to make tea and that it can even substitute coffee or any caffeinated beverages. The students from Richard’s class did demonstrations on how to make a natural mosquito repellent, a burn salve, and a compress made of aromatic herbs. There were also two group consultations, one on diabetes and the other on arthritis. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding these illnesses and they were given recommendations of natural remedies they could use to alleviate their symptoms.

Members who have participated in these activities continue to have a greater interest in learning more herbal medicine and the benefits of native plants. Members of the community are very interested in these types of activities and use them as a space to share with others different herbal home remedies. CATA will continue to develop this work with Richard and our members in order to deepen our knowledge of herbal medicine and seek fair and just alternatives to our current food system.

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Keep up with CATA on Facebook!
Just search for CATA - The Farmworker Support Committee to see pictures and updates of our members and the work that we do.
Michael was a 2016 summer intern for CATA through the Princeton University Princeton Internships in Civic Service Program and he shared this reflection with us on his time with CATA and working with the migrant community. After his internship was over, Michael returned to give a presentation to Bridgeton City Council on his research into municipal ID programs and his recommendations on implementation in Bridgeton, NJ. The presentation was well received and a committee is currently being formed to work out the details of feasibility and implementation.

Throughout the summer I have been fortunate enough to be able to spend time with CATA and learn about the work and challenges the organization faces in an increasingly complicated and divided world. Welcomed in feeling as an outsider, I quickly came to familiarize myself with the different issues that CATA is confronted with as it attempts to strengthen and help a community while simultaneously maintaining its role as facilitator in the relationship between the people it serves and those that can deliver them the change they seek. CATA has both experience and success with bettering the community that it works with because it knows that the path towards sustained improvements is one that will come about from the work of the very people who are struggling. Only through the work of the community and their unity will lasting success be achieved.

For this lesson, I am grateful. It is with this methodology and mission that I began to work on my own projects while at CATA. By researching how to open a bank account without a Social Security Number, I would be providing information on the necessary steps to take and, more importantly, providing people the access to opportunities from which they had been barred. Like the community organizers of CATA who offer their services to farmworkers that they may not even know, I too was trying to help a community of which I had no history. And similarly to how CATA plants the seeds of success for members of the community to harvest, I hope that my work will also prove to be the tool from which future members of CATA can benefit.

The other focus of my summer similarly concentrated on empowering and providing the means with which I hope others will be able to achieve success. By working towards the creation of a municipal ID program in the city of Bridgeton, NJ, I am attempting to clear the path for people to take towards realizing changes in their lives. Through the ID cards, I envision that residents of the city may be able to walk more safely down the street because they can deposit their money in bank accounts they didn’t have access to before. Everyone in the city could feel more comfortable in their community as the partnership between residents, city government, and the local police department would be strengthened.

While my time hasn’t been without challenges, I can reflect on my summer with CATA and truly believe that the work that I did might someday prove to be the connection between someone’s desire for improvement in their lives and the realization of that goal. Looking back, I now see that in its experience with one more person searching for advancement and progression, CATA proved yet again able to facilitate my goals and aspirations towards realizing success that I hadn’t even imagined when I first came to them.
Join CATA’s Campaign for Workers’ Rights!

Migrant workers are a vulnerable population that continues to be taken advantage of in their workplace and community. For CATA, workers’ rights are the number one priority and need to be a part of every dialogue from food justice to immigration reform to climate change and we need your help to keep this work going.

Between September 1, Labor Day, and September 16, 2016, Mexican Independence Day, CATA will run an online fundraising campaign so our members will have the resources they need to continue to stand up for the rights they deserve.

Our goal is to raise $10,000 to support our work of outreach, engagement, and organizing in the immigrant community. The funds you help us raise will allow CATA to reach more workers and provide worker leaders with the foundation to seek justice in their workplaces and communities.

If you would like campaign materials ahead of time to share with your networks, please email catamlh@aol.com.

Starting September 1, 2016, check out www.cata-farmworkers/org for how to participate in the campaign. We thank you for your support!

CATA is proud to be a member of EarthShare New Jersey (ESNJ), a non-profit organization created and directed by member organizations to represent us in employee workplace giving campaigns.

Please consider making a donation to CATA through your workplace. Don’t have a workplace giving campaign at your office? Contact CATA to assist you in setting one up. The code for CATA for the Federal Campaign is 39411 and the NJ State Campaign is 3341. Visit www.cata-farmworkers.org for a complete list. For more information on ESNJ go to www.earthsharenj.org.
I want to be an ally with CATA’s work for justice!

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