

Latino Los Angeles

Transformations, Communities, and Activism

Edited by Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa

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13 Organizing Immigrant Workers

Action Research and Strategies in the Pomona Day Labor Center

José Z. Calderon, Suzanne F. Foster, and Silvia L. Rodriguez

After a local ordinance was passed in the city of Pomona, California, to get day laborers off street corners, a city policeman confronted a day laborer about his inability to read an antisolicitation ordinance in English. Asking a student to interpret for him, the policeman shook his finger as he scolded the day laborer:

He is in violation of the law. If he is going to sit here now and say "I don't, understand, I don't speak English," he has to make a decision. That decision is, you can either learn to speak English to function in society, because that's what the signs are, they are in English, or find himself in violation of the law. It's that simple . . . learn English or go to jail. (Beetley-Hagler 2000)

The action of this policeman, captured on videotape by then-Pitzer College student Andy Beetley-Hagler, is not an isolated case. It is how city officials and law enforcement agencies have responded in many urban and suburban communities where Latino day laborers, known as *jornaleros*, congregate on street corners to seek jobs. Groups of men can be found gathering on urban street corners, hardware store parking lots, and truck rental facilities looking for work. These are men who do not have permanent jobs but are driven to work by circumstances on a day-to-day basis. According to a study conducted by Abel Valenzuela (1999), director of UCLA's Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, "Day laborers are overwhelmingly Latino, predominately from Mexico."

Changes in immigration laws and regional economic restructuring are credited for the thousands of Latino immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Central American countries entering the United States and accepting jobs in the low-wage and low-skill service sector (Soja and Scott 1996). The passage of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965 increased the total number of immigrants admitted to the United States and inadvertently gave opportunities to approximately five million immi-

grants in the service sector (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). As described by Myrna Cherkoss Donahoe in this volume, the deindustrialization of Los Angeles led to a loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector, a restructuring process of growth in "high-skill, high-tech" employment, and the rise of a service sector based on low-wage workers and an informal economy (Pastor 2000; Valle and Torres 2000; Soja and Scott 1996; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). As Los Angeles deindustrialized with the loss of steel, automobile, and tire manufacturing between 1965 and 1992, new jobs were generated in the informal and service sectors that paid low wages, were nonunionized, and offered few protections and benefits. These transformations have contributed to a growth in both the Latino population and the low-wage manual labor pool that is used to advance economic growth (Soja 1996; Milkman 2000; Milkman and Wong 2000).

Some of these Latino immigrants have become part of the informal economy as day laborers or workers who are hired on a temporary basis in both the service and commercial sectors. The informal economy is characterized by low wages, usually paid by an employer in cash, and working conditions that are unregulated (Sassen 1994, 2001; Pardo 1998). In the Southern California region, it is estimated that there are twenty thousand day laborers looking for work on a daily basis (Añorve, Osborn, and Salas 2000). Of this number, 78 percent are Mexican, 20 percent Central American, 1 percent U.S.-born, and 1 percent born elsewhere (Valenzuela 1999).

With an increase of day labor sites and corners, thirty cities in the Los Angeles region have adopted some type of municipal ordinance against the solicitation of work in public spaces (Toma and Esbenschade 2000, 57). Some of these ordinances have been in response to complaints by local residents and businesses. Others have been as a result of an anti-immigrant sentiment that has been propagated by right-wing organizations and politicians who have blamed immigrants for everything from the loss of jobs and social services to the cyclical downturns in the U.S. economy (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996, 445–55; Acuña 1996, 158–64). Pomona's Ordinance 3814, approved in June 1996, fines workers up to one thousand dollars and/or places them in jail for up to six months if they solicit employment on any street, public area, or parking lot. The city of Ontario, California, passed a similar ordinance prohibiting the solicitation of employment on public streets and at unauthorized commercial and industrial parking areas (Clark 2000, A1).

Unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) have responded to these attacks by organizing immigrant workers and supporting legislation to give complete amnesty to undocumented workers. However, they held back on organizing day laborers. Hence, other grassroots groups, organizations, and individuals have recognized the need to fill that void (López-Garza 2000, 162–63; Toma and Esbenshade 2000; Acuña 1996, 197–98; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 221–29; Valenzuela 1999; Jones-Correa 1998).

This chapter focuses on a collaborative effort in the city of Pomona, where college students, a faculty member, community advocates, and day laborers joined together to establish an official site from which day laborers could negotiate employment. This case study is part of a larger story taking place throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area and the United States, where workers are creating partnerships and coalitions to build power and defend their rights.

Our findings show that day laborers are difficult to organize. Unlike other low-wage workers such as janitors and gardeners who are more established in specific locations with specific employers, day laborers are highly mobile and dependent on different employers on a daily basis. These difficulties have manifested themselves in the use of various strategies to organize day laborers. One strategy depends on a top-down (business-union-type) model that excludes the voices of the workers and simultaneously uses antisolicitation city government ordinances and law enforcement agencies to force day laborers off the streets. Another strategy, the participatory model, focuses on improving the long-term conditions of day laborers by advancing services aimed at improving their quality of life and involving them in the policy making and leadership building. This chapter, inasmuch as it is about building collaborative relations, is also about the different strategies that are being used to organize day laborers.

The Pomona Day Labor Center

The Pomona Day Labor Center is situated in the city of Pomona, which is located thirty miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Similar to the demographic changes taking place in Los Angeles, Pomona's overall population has grown from 131,723 in 1990 to 149,473 in 2000, a 13.5 percent change. The population changes between 1990 and 2000 have resulted in

the proportion of Latinos in the city's population growing from 54 percent (77,776) to 65 percent (96,370); Asian/Pacific Islanders remaining at about 7 percent (from 9,846 to 10,765); African Americans decreasing from 14 percent (19,013) to 10 percent (14,398); and Whites decreasing from 26 percent (36,687) to 17 percent (25,348) (U.S. Census Bureau 1990, 2000).

Since opening its doors on January 5, 1998, the center has been located in a business center west of downtown and east of the Corona Freeway. A Contractor's Warehouse is located on the south side of the business center. Employers gather materials at the Contractor's Warehouse and then proceed to hire workers who congregate in the parking lot. *La esquina*, as the corner in front of the center where some workers wait for employers is called, has an eighteen-year history of serving as a gathering place for day laborers.

On entering the center, a long bar-shaped table awaits the employer or employee. From this table a staff member greets employers and registers day laborers for employment on a first-come and first-serve basis. A roster is used to keep records about who works on any given day, the hours worked, the salary received, and the employer's information, such as license plate numbers. The day laborers who do not go on a work assignment for the day are given priority on the roster the following day.

Behind the table are some filing cabinets and office supplies, which are next to a used computer that sits on a desk. A plain wall, constructed by the day laborers, separates the front desk from a long room. The walls, painted a plain green by the student interns and day laborers, display various posters, including one with a United Farm Workers' Union flag. On any given day, one can see workers watching television at one corner of the room as others work diligently at a table of computers. At the other corner, half a dozen workers are observed sitting around a folding table playing cards. This room is also the site for various Pitzer College student-led efforts, which include language training, health care referral, and immigration rights services.

Campus/Community Partnership

A partnership between Pitzer College and the day laborers in Pomona developed out of a common interest in community building. Pitzer College, a coeducational liberal arts college located in the city of Claremont

with an enrollment of approximately 850 men and women, has had a history of encouraging social responsibility through student participation in community service learning projects.

The authors of this article reflected this ethos by carrying out research and participating in various organizing efforts alongside the day laborers in Pomona. As part of a course in the spring of 1997 called "Restructuring Communities," Professor José Z. Calderon had college students interning in various local movements so that they could work with community activists. One of the student groups began to work with Fabian Nuñez, a community activist and Pitzer student (who is now the speaker of the California State Assembly). Meanwhile, Pomona city officials were debating ways to implement the municipal ordinance approved in 1996 to remove day laborers from public streets. Professor Calderon and his students joined Nuñez, day laborers, and other Pomona community organizers in packing city hall to protest the ordinance. When city officials defended their actions by claiming that all day laborers were undocumented, Pitzer students presented evidence proving that permanent residents also made up a portion of those who solicited work on the street corners. Using Valenzuela's aforementioned 1999 study on day laborers, the students showed the council that a portion of day laborers had resided in the United States for ten years or more.

In addition, Pitzer students explored other alternatives to the punishment and incarceration proposed by city officials. Pitzer students visited day labor centers organized by the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), which receive more than one hundred thousand dollars each from the city of Los Angeles. They gathered crucial information on the success of well-established day labor centers, which led to a funding proposal for a similar center in Pomona. The funding information in particular has been extremely useful in the struggle to receive more financial support from the city of Pomona and from private foundations for the Pomona Day Labor Center.

Ultimately, the Pomona City Council supported the establishment of a day labor center near the most popular day laborer corner. Although calling it "unlawful" to solicit work in public spaces, Ordinance 3814 proclaimed that a "designated day labor center" was the only "lawful" place to solicit work in the city. Subsequently, a coalition of community organizers and students formed a nonprofit organization, the Pomona Economic Opportunity Center (PEOC), which received fifty thousand

dollars in seed money from the city of Pomona's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to establish a day labor center (Tresague 1997). The city also appointed a board of directors that included city commission members, some independent consultants, and community representatives. Resulting from the college's involvement, the city council also appointed Professor Calderon and various students to the board.

An on-site director was hired to oversee the daily operations of the center. A lawyer on the board who had organized a day labor center in Glendale, California, suggested that the PEOC hire directors from outside the center. Unfortunately, due to high overhead costs and a lack of consistent financial resources, the PEOC was unable to pay the director a substantial wage or offer adequate benefits. This placed most of the pressure on the site director, because he worked 7 days a week and 365 days a year. Without adequate funds to hire a staff that could take care of the operational needs of the center, the burden of administering the nonprofit organization fell on the shoulders of the board of directors.

Embedded in the allocation of the seed money was the city's expectation that the center would be able to become self-sufficient. As a way to achieve self-sufficiency, the original organizers of the center encouraged the workers to pay dues of thirty dollars per month. Although the dues collections were sporadic, with many workers not paying at all, the dues eventually dropped to twenty dollars and then to ten dollars. The initial seed money and workers' dues, although helping to sustain the center's operation for two years, was not enough to cover the total costs. With the help of Pitzer College's Center for California Cultural and Social Issues (CCCSI), Professor Calderon urged more of his students to use their research at the center to write funding proposals to the city and various private foundations. Although the grants were relatively small and not enough to hire a full-time executive director, they were instrumental in keeping the center in operation.

Promoting Social Change through Participatory Research

The summer of 1999 served as a critical turning point in the development of the center. Under the direction of José Calderon, Pitzer students Suzanne Foster and Silvia Rodriguez (along with fellow student Jill McGougan) served as participants and researchers at the Pomona Day

Labor Center from June 1999 until April 2000. They talked to the day laborers and listened closely to their experiences, including their transition from the corner to the center and their life stories. The methodology of participant observation was used in order to collect information about the center and to build a successful organization. The three students taught English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, trained new student interns working at the center, helped to advance the development of a health project, and wrote proposals to foundations for funding. Suzanne Foster, co-vice president of the center's board of directors in 2000, wrote a senior thesis entitled "Empowerment Services and Social Change at the Pomona Day Labor Center." Jill McGougan, who has served on the center's board of directors since 2000, also wrote a senior thesis entitled "The Internal and External Factors Impacting a Day Labor Center."

In contrast to traditional research methods, our research team focused its inquiries on those issues that primarily benefited the day laborer community. Rather than setting ourselves apart from the community that we were researching, we sought to participate alongside the day laborers in finding solutions to the problems that they were facing (Nyden et al. 1999). We applied aspects of the action research method, where both the researchers and community participants collaborate to produce knowledge with the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and analysis (Greenwood and Levin 1998). The kind of change that this methodology refers to is one that is pragmatic and involves the community participants in the decision-making process so that they can negotiate having more control over their lives. Our research team participated in all aspects of the day labor center's activities. We informed the workers about our research and shared our findings as a means of advancing collaboration around grant proposals, policy changes, and board decisions. Because of the highly mobile character of day laborers based on their fluctuating opportunities for work, we were not able to involve them directly in the research methodology on a daily basis. Nevertheless, we shared our research processes, findings, and written work with them.

In seeking to apply a methodology that could involve the workers in the research process, the research team began with the premise that trust had to be an essential component of a just relationship with the day laborer community and that this could only be accomplished through equal participation and compassion. Raúl Gomez, an ex-day laborer who visited the center in June 1999, expressed to Foster the importance of

having mutual respect as a foundation for the success of any project at the center. He commented that "the workers are very sensitive to being talked down to or to being made to feel stupid," and that without respect on the part of all the participants, the researchers "shouldn't volunteer, nor should anyone else."

The research team took this advice into serious consideration as it met with CHIRLA, the Institute of Popular Education of Southern California (IDEPSCA), and the Community Learning Network (CLN) in order to assess their methods of organizing day laborers and use of popular education. Based on our meetings with these groups, our research team determined that the so-called top-down model of organizing is an ineffective way to organize day laborers and that a more effective model is one that emphasizes "worker participation, confrontation, pressure from arenas other than the worksite itself, and strategic planning" (Sherman and Voss 2000, 84).

Top-Down Organizing Model

The top-down model of organizing day laborers can be compared to the traditional models of unionism that rely primarily on dues in exchange for a staff that handles the problems of the members (Sherman and Voss 2000). This type of organizing places the primary power in the hands of the staff and treats the worker as a secondary participant.

This business-unionism model best characterized the practice of two consultants working on day laborer issues for a national hardware supply company. The consultants (whose names have been changed) began their participation with the Pomona Day Labor Center when the nonprofit board of directors was in its developmental stages. Alice Smith, one of the consultants, described herself as a student from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) carrying out research on day laborers. The other consultant, Winston Nelson, introduced himself as a lawyer who volunteered his services to help establish day labor centers in the region. Both of the consultants immediately moved into leadership positions at the center by claiming that they had created models for establishing day labor centers in other Los Angeles area cities like Glendale and El Monte.

When the center first opened, Smith and Nelson implemented a membership structure in Pomona that they had used in other cities. This structure defined members as those who used the services of the center

and paid the thirty dollar dues. Smith and Nelson originally imposed the dues component as a means of persuading the workers to follow the center's rules and to develop a basis for self-sufficiency. They negatively labeled those day laborers who chose not to become members of the center as *piratas* (pirates), a name that workers at the center continue to use to this day. Further, they persuaded some of the first directors of the center to portray the *piratas* publicly as being drug and alcohol users. The directors were also trained by Smith and Nelson to enforce the ordinance and use the police to force the *piratas* to register as members of the center. This tactic involved getting members of the center to distribute fliers at the parking lot entrance that spoke negatively about the *piratas*, advising employers of the city's ordinance, and calling on employers to hire day laborers only from the city-sanctioned center. Smith used cameras and two-way radios to pinpoint the so-called *piratas*. The center's director was instructed to call the police to report fights and disturbances, even when such activities were not happening. Later, the police officers realized that the calls were placed solely to instill fear and to force the workers to become members of the center and to generate revenue. Two police officers were present at a board of directors' meeting on August 18, 1999. They announced that they would no longer respond to what they called "fraudulent calls." Even after the police department took this position, Smith and Nelson insisted that the phone calls were necessary to implement the ordinance and to stop the growing concentration of day laborers on the corner.

The strategies used under the direction of Smith and Nelson divided the day laborers, created conflict between those who were considered members of the center and those who were not, and increased animosity between the day laborers and the center's board of directors. Subsequently, the board of directors began to question Smith and Nelson on criticisms raised by the day laborers about the workers' lack of representation in the center's decision-making processes. For example, pursuant to the recommendations of Smith and Nelson, the board of directors agreed to charge the day laborers thirty dollars per month in dues. According to Smith and Nelson, these were the wishes of the day laborers themselves. Later, through a meeting between members of the board and the day laborers, the board learned that the workers had never voted or reached a consensus on paying this amount. According to the workers,

the idea of paying dues and the amount were imposed on them by Smith and Nelson.

The board also questioned Smith concerning the reason that worker representatives no longer attended the board meetings, as prescribed by the bylaws of the organization. She reported that the worker representatives had problems with their board membership and "had decided to resign." Smith did not explain the reasons for the workers' resignations nor did she attempt to recruit more day laborers to the board. Instead, Smith committed herself to being present at all the meetings and serving as a liaison between the board and the day laborers. Meanwhile, Nelson proposed a change in the organization's bylaws to have a five-member board instead of the original eleven to thirteen members, five of which were designated as day laborers. Although Nelson's proposed bylaw change was never voted on, the day laborers stopped coming to the meetings and Smith took the liaison position.

By January 1999, Nelson and Smith had moved into the positions of president and treasurer of the board of directors. Since the other board members did not have the time to devote to these positions, no one objected to their appointments. Their role as liaisons, however, resulted in a lack of communication between the board of directors and the day laborers. Further, the day laborers began to raise questions about the center's expenditures and, in particular, how their dues were being used.

The Needs of the Workers

Although recent studies of new immigrants have found a high rate of labor force participation and a low usage of public assistance, this does not mean that they do not have needs related to quality-of-life issues (Pastor 2000). Largely because of their undocumented status, day laborers turn to places such as day labor centers to help provide employment and education opportunities.

The research team soon learned of the day laborers' criticism of Smith for her failure to implement the English classes she had promised for at least a year. From the day laborers' perspectives, English was essential for gaining employment, negotiating a decent wage, and contesting mistreatment. Manuel Gonzalez, one of the day laborers at the center, emphasized this point at a general membership meeting. He said that the

day laborers had all agreed to come to the center in the beginning because it promised job training, English classes, and other benefits, but the workers never received these services. He was angry because the workers had been promised these programs and services but had received only an organized system of work distribution, shelter, and a bathroom. As reported in Foster's July 1999 field notes, the workers didn't even have any drinking water.

Smith and Nelson's strategy centered more on meeting employers' needs for workers who worked hard and did not question anything or complain. This exemplifies the situation that some studies describe where employers prefer immigrant workers as a "controllable labor force" that works hard and keeps quiet about working conditions for fear of deportation (Ong and Valenzuela 1996).

The desire of the day laborers to improve their quality of life required a move beyond the marketplace strategies of supply and demand. It demanded that the workers be treated as "subjects," not as "objects," in the process (Freire 1993). This was a difficult transition to implement, particularly when the workers were caught in the immediacy of survival. Author Henry Giroux proposes that the "notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor process and the need of capital accumulation" (1983). The necessity of trading labor for wages becomes the primary focus of many people's realities, although critical thinking, culture, and power are perhaps equally significant. The labor process does not freely allow access to education and critical thinking because of its strong demands on people. Although gaining employment is an essential piece of the puzzle, attaining empowering education and services significantly aids a strategy for organizing workers.

The urgent requests of the members of the center for certain services demonstrated that, although employment was a priority, it certainly was not the only valued goal. For example, several men wrote "*superar*" (to advance, or succeed) when asked what they most wanted on their membership application for the center. Although an equal number, if not more, answered "work" to this question, it could not be denied that these men had additional goals and dreams that deserved to be addressed. One man, Miguel Venustiano, answered the same question on July 5, 1999, in this way: "Quiero triunfar, para sacar adelante a mi familia, y así devolverles la felicidad y la paz que ellos me ofrecen" (I want to triumph, to

move my family forward, and by doing this return to them the happiness and peace that they have given me).

The experience of a seventy-five-year-old immigrant worker at the center exemplifies this issue. Originally a farmer in Mexico, Pepe Sánchez is considered a grandfather by the day laborers and placed in honor at the top of the roster list for jobs daily. Realizing that Sanchez was getting too old to work, the site director looked into the possibility of obtaining some type of social services for him. As with other immigrant workers, the case has become entangled in the bureaucratic process of proving permanent resident status. The day may well come when Sánchez is physically unable to work but has no one to look out for him. This elderly day laborer's case brought forward the need to move beyond employment services to also provide immigration rights, education, and health care services at the center. The center now emphasizes community building along with employment and encourages everyone to look out for each other.

The men at the center have a wide range of skills and educational levels. Some have not completed a sixth-grade level of education, whereas others have earned their university degree in their country of origin. Some have completed or almost completed high school in the United States. Others have received training all of their lives, in different areas like manufacturing, construction, or agriculture. Although there is no lack of skills at the center, there is a lack of knowledge regarding local resources and services that would allow the workers to improve and build on what they already know or even earn a more advanced degree. Some workers, like Tomás Rios and Antonio Guerrero, do not feel that they can attain their goals in a system that is not in their language, or in a country that is not officially their own. Attaining these skills or knowledge can improve their socioeconomic status, improve their outlook on life, and help them find permanent employment. This knowledge and provision of services are essential to their empowerment as human beings and as working immigrants.

Smith and Nelson pitted the need for employment against the need for other types of services. Calderon's field notes from June 22, 1999, reflect a meeting between our research team and Smith in which she claimed that the most effective strategy for running a day labor center was to implement what she called a "union" model. This model, according to Smith, allows the workers to restrict the supply of their labor and

to force the employers to pay a living wage above the minimum. Smith suggested that the union model was currently used at the center. She added that this strategy had resulted in the day laborers agreeing collectively on a minimum hourly wage of \$7.00 to charge employers. She stated that other day labor centers (particularly those directed by the organization CHIRLA) implemented the “social service agency model that do[es] not have a collective minimum wage” and “will accept paying the workers only \$5.00 an hour, and even below.” Smith went on to explain that the service model practiced by CHIRLA resulted in the day laborers using the centers primarily for the free services and not to reach financial stability. “The day laborers protest against freebies,” said Smith during our meeting. Our research of CHIRLA day labor centers revealed that they do have an established collective minimum wage of \$8.00 an hour and, as described later in this chapter, that they provide access to an array of services.

One Pitzer student researcher, Heather Miller, found that some day laborers shied away from available services, but not for the reasons stated by Smith. As the Pomona Day Labor Center began to sponsor health screenings and eye exams, it was noted that some day laborers hesitated because of their immigration status and because of their need to make work the primary focus of their lives. Others openly mentioned a lack of trust in established institutions (Miller 2001).

The Participatory Model for Day Laborer Organizing

Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, in *Building Bridges*, propose that successful organizing strategies among workers, in addition to ensuring their full democratic participation, involve the advancement of coalitions between worker and community organizations “that go beyond the traditional limits of collective bargaining” (1990, 196).

CHIRLA and IDEPSCA are carrying out all aspects of this participatory model when organizing day laborers. In mid-1999, the research team met with two CHIRLA representatives, Day Laborer Project coordinator Pablo Alvarado and Worker’s Rights Project coordinator Victor Narro. They introduced their projects and their methods to involve day laborers in all facets of the organizing effort. Alvarado explained that in 1989, CHIRLA assisted the city of Los Angeles in opening the first day laborer site in the nation, located in Harbor City. CHIRLA organizers

assisted in the creation of the site, but did not get directly involved in the operation of the center. Rather, the Harbor City site was considered a pilot project and was first operated by the city of Los Angeles. In 1990, the city opened another site in North Hollywood. Between 1989 and 1996, both centers were operated by the Los Angeles Community Development Department. The department viewed the day laborers’ presence primarily as a health and safety issue, and therefore did not allow the workers to organize or to initiate marketing campaigns about the center.

CHIRLA soon began to move beyond informal organizing at street corners to organizing around the issues that affected day laborers throughout Los Angeles. During this time, CHIRLA’s efforts were concentrated at one corner in the Ladera Heights community, where there was a local movement to criminalize day laborers. Here, CHIRLA organized a multi-racial coalition to defend the rights of day laborers and to protest against a citywide initiative targeting day laborers. In 1994, the Los Angeles County supervisors passed a local ordinance, similar to the one later passed in the city of Pomona, against labor solicitation on public and private property in unincorporated areas. Rather than calling for any specific penalty, the supervisors left it up to property owners to implement the ordinance. In response, CHIRLA developed a “free speech zone” where collaboration occurred among the police, local residents, Home Depot, community organizations, and the day laborers. The Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission facilitated collaborative meetings where a number of conflict resolution sessions were held between the residents and day laborers. These sessions resulted in policies that benefited the status of day laborers in other areas throughout the county. In addition to ensuring respect for free speech areas for day laborers, it advanced the implementation of similar “human relations models” in places such as Woodland Hills, the area centered in Maria A. Gutierrez de Soldatenko’s discussion of Justice for Janitors in this volume. Here, government officials sought to stop the concentration of day laborers on corners by employing police on horseback. CHIRLA proposed the alternative of organizing day labor centers as community-based organizations that included the voices of day laborers. According to the CHIRLA representatives, the city of Los Angeles began receiving a great deal of criticism for not finding solutions to day laborers gathering on corners, an issue that some city officials categorized as *el patito feo* (the ugly duckling), or a problem that no one wanted. In 1996, the city of

Los Angeles sought to address this issue by releasing requests for proposals (RFPs) and inviting community organizations interested in administering the various day laborer centers to submit bids. In the first round of RFPs, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA were the only agencies that applied. City officials opened up another round of RFPs with the intention of getting more applications, with no result. In the absence of other interested organizations, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA were given a contract to operate the various sites and to implement various conflict mediation programs. According to Calderon's field notes from July 6, 1999, CHIRLA and IDEPSCA were then receiving up to \$112 thousand from Community Development Block Grant funds annually for each of four different centers.

Moving beyond the health and safety models developed by the city of Los Angeles, CHIRLA introduced three participatory components for organizing day laborer centers:

1. Ensure the basic civil, labor, and human rights of day laborers by involving them in advocacy efforts on issues that directly affect them.
2. Develop employment opportunities through outreach and marketing strategies organized by day laborers.
3. Advance a practice of civic engagement by involving day laborers in their communities (initiating volunteer community cleanups, remodeling old housing, organizing soccer leagues, and so forth).

In contradistinction to the perspective of Alice Smith, the CHIRLA representatives rejected the idea of day laborer organization being narrowly configured along the lines of a service agency model. Mayron Payes, a CHIRLA organizer, explained that CHIRLA uses "different approaches" to ensure the "full participation" of the day laborers. CHIRLA provides services such as assistance with wage claim cases both to encourage participation in the center and to defend workers' rights. He added that these services do not make workers more dependent, but improve the conditions of their lives so that they can fully participate in all aspects of civil society. Since the majority of the day laborers are Latino, CHIRLA has sought to tap the cultural aspects of this particular community. Payes gave various examples of this approach, including the organization of a soccer team, a *teatro* (theater) group, and a musical group. In addition, a group of workers was collaborating at that time to produce a

newsletter for day laborers. Other day laborers join in a yearly day labor conference where organizing strategies are discussed. For Payes, these "nontraditional" approaches to organizing allow "day laborers to participate, to grow as persons and as a community, and to reduce their alienation." In terms of empowerment, the CHIRLA representatives also spoke about another group of day laborers organizing themselves into a union, El Sindicato de Jornaleros. The workers have also organized themselves and lobbied their state representatives to pass a bill supporting the right of undocumented workers to obtain driver's licenses or state-sanctioned identification cards. In this way, CHIRLA representatives claim, day laborers move beyond the individual needs of getting a job and securing good wages to organizing around the policies that affect their everyday lives.

CHIRLA supported this process of empowerment by holding a day laborer leadership school. The leadership school provided a forum for discussion and education on how institutions function in the United States, how the global economy affects day laborers, and how they can become participants in the decision-making process. The success of the leadership school could be seen at the day labor centers and corners, where the workers take the lead in implementing their own rules, devising their own processes of distributing work each morning, holding general decision-making assemblies, and participating in monthly advisory board meetings.

CHIRLA's strategy of organizing has been implemented in the approximately 150 corners throughout Los Angeles where day laborers gather. Since it is impossible to acquire funding for so many day labor centers, Pablo Alvarado states that CHIRLA has found an alternative by building collaborative relationships among residents, city officials, and day laborers at these various sites:

With a little organizing and conflict mediation, we have been able to turn tense situations at some of these corners into places where the workers have negotiated their responsibilities to these communities by developing agreed-upon rules of conduct and designated employment pickup sites.

CHIRLA and IDEPSCA utilize a participatory model based on popular education in the delivery of their services and in their organizing principles. Similar to various workers' rights centers organized in Los Angeles,

the work of CHIRLA and IDEPSCA goes beyond social services. Their organizing principles empower the workers. The workers understand the world around them. In addition, they receive leadership training to create changes in their conditions (Bonacich 2000, 146). According to the CHIRLA representatives, this holistic approach serves the needs of the day laborers and advances the goal of creating "self-sustaining communities."

Pomona's Day Labor Center: Building the Participatory Model

An effort to duplicate the participatory model at the Pomona Day Labor Center faced a serious challenge. The research team discovered that Smith and Nelson had been writing fraudulent progress reports to the city of Pomona claiming to be implementing various services at the center, including ESL classes; translation and mediation services between workers and employers; referring workers to appropriate agencies for services; and conducting tax workshops (City of Pomona 1999). This same report revealed some important figures that the day laborers had no knowledge about:

A help to the Pomona program are the materials and expenses donated by [a national hardware supply company] of \$9,280.40 in the last year, and the two consultants paid by the [company] to facilitate the program, a lawyer [Nelson] and a day laborer organizer [Smith] who organized [a nearby city's] program as well as others (\$55,532.50 in the last year, actual billed hours). (City of Pomona 1999)

Smith and Nelson were asked by the center's board of directors to account for these funds. As noted in Calderon's field notes from November 17, 1999, a board member requested an itemized budget reflecting how the consultant fees were spent, the conditions under which the funds were granted, and the actual use of the funds in relation to the center. Nelson's response to the request was that the consultant fees were not anyone's business but his own, and that he didn't ask where anyone else's "personal paychecks came from."

Under fire from the day laborers and the board, both Smith and Nelson resigned their positions as treasurer and president, respectively. Their resignations gave way to a more democratic process in which workers were involved in decision making at the center, the development of

partnerships was strongly emphasized, and the particular services that the workers had been asking for were finally implemented.

A partnership developed that, like the participatory model, sought to use a holistic approach with a combination of employment opportunities, leadership training, various services, projects, meetings, and organizing efforts to sustain the center. Through a collaborative effort with the Community Learning Network (CLN), an organization based at Claremont Graduate University, several Pitzer students (including the co-authors) began to develop an ESL curriculum for the center. CLN's organizers advised the Pitzer students on implementing a participatory action model of education and organization that focused on the community's assets rather than its deficiencies (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). The model CLN used seeks to overcome the practices of many community initiatives, which, rather than advancing a "positive capacity-building venture," serve only to perpetuate "feelings of dependency" (Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson 1997). CLN sought to advance this community-building process by assessing the needs of the community, connecting to its skills and resources, and working on common issues.

The CLN organizers and the Pitzer students used focus groups as the primary vehicle to gather information on the needs and assets at the center. The focus groups identified the needs for work, ESL classes, and information on immigrants' rights. The focus groups also determined that the men had a vast amount of personal knowledge about their experience as immigrants, crossing physical and political borders, and trading their labor for wages. The ESL classes, then, were taught in such a way that acknowledged the workers' experiences and areas of expertise. Further, the curriculum helped to draw out the workers' opinions on issues at the center and other needed resources.

This participatory model of communication and education was implemented with the intention of empowering the workers to examine critically the issues in their realities, to connect them with other issues in a process of problematizing their similarities, and to reflect upon their common themes for social change (Freire 1993, 89). Through the process of dialogue, the students and teachers together created a curriculum that focused on experiences and themes that were important to them, including employment, tools, and health (Bentley 2001).

A health project emerged after a student found out that a worker was

very ill and did not have access to health care. After the student took this individual to a doctor, many other workers asked for similar help. A partnership was soon created between the center and the Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona and regular health screenings and health referrals were implemented. More than thirty medical interns and doctors from Western University's Pomona Community Health Action Team (PCHAT) performed physical exams at the center. Eighty workers attended the health fair and more than fifty workers received physicals—some for the first time in many years.

Presently, Pitzer students continue to expand the health project to include eye and dental care. One man, in his sixties, had experienced difficulty with his vision for ten years. When the students took him to get an eye exam and bought him glasses through the program, he related that a whole new world had opened up to him. Now he could see things around him that he had never seen before.

An immigration rights project was also launched at the center. An immigration rights lawyer held a workshop on recent changes in immigration laws. Some student interns were involved on various legal cases, including one where an employer refused to pay three workers a total of three thousand dollars owed to them. Through the simple process of training and educating the workers on how to prepare and file a small claims suit, the full amount was eventually retrieved.

Transforming Los Angeles through Coalition Building

With the transformation of the Los Angeles region to a postindustrial urban economy there has been an expansion of high-wage professionals, on one end, and low-wage unorganized manual laborers, on the other. These developments have led to an increase of day laborers in the informal economy, which has resulted in various efforts aimed at organizing them.

Some initiatives, led by conservative anti-immigrant groups, have sought to abolish various services and programs, such as bilingual education and adult literacy programs, that can help build the economic and political capacity of immigrant workers (Ono and Sloop 2002; Crawford 1992; Calderon 1989). There are others who promote municipal ordinances either to criminalize day laborers or to promote their exploitation

as a cheap labor force. What these groups have in common is a top-down strategy that aims at dividing immigrant workers from the working class and excluding them from the growing political voice and clout of a growing Latino and "minority majority" population.

The story of the implementation of participatory strategies through collaborative partnerships described in this chapter shows that there is no contradiction between the use of education as a service and an organizational form that is inclusive of the day laborers' voices and leadership. Through the use of nontraditional methods that allow for critical dialogue and the involvement of the participants, the goals of an empowering education can be achieved. Ira Shor, a pacesetter in the field of critical education, defines the goals of an empowering education as relating "personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change" (1992, 15). The collaboration between Pitzer College and the Pomona Day Labor Center, although confronting many obstacles, has advanced the development of a participatory action model between the day laborer and campus communities, a culture of bottom-up decision making by all the partners involved, and a connection between the needed services of day laborers and an organizational form to advocate for their rights.

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