



“To connect and empower immigrants with resources to achieve legal documentation, fulfill their economic needs, and integrate into the community.”

## IRC Congratulates New U.S. Citizens

The IRC has helped a large number of people apply for U.S. citizenship during the past year, with the upcoming elections spurring interest among applicants. **Brenda Perez Chavez** was among those 67 legal permanent residents who have applied for naturalization through the IRC’s legal services program since last fall. Now, she has gained status as a U.S. citizen:

There are lots of stories of people who crossed the Mexican border and all the heartache they went through, but my story, the story of Brenda Perez Chavez, has not been told.



Brenda celebrates her new status as a U.S. citizen with her family.

This is a brief overview of how I became a U.S citizen. I crossed the border with my grandpa, mom, and brother when I was only 5 years old. My dad is a legal resident; he was able to gain status with the Immigration Reform of the 1980s by President Ronald Reagan.

After 5 years of trying to become a legal immigrant and being unsuccessful, a family friend gave my mom the number to the SLV Immigration Resource Center, and said to speak with Flora Archuleta. Flora

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## 150-Mile Walk for Immigration Justice

IRC staff member *Elsa Goossen* joined an interfaith solidarity walk for eleven days in August, traveling 150 miles from the Tijuana-San Diego border to Los Angeles and advocating for humane immigration reform. She reflects on the experience:

Two months ago, I was slowly making my way up the coast of southern California, trusting my sore feet to carry me and my belongings forward. I had joined more than 100 other people to participate in El Camino del

Inmigrante, an inter-denominational walk for immigrant justice organized by the Christian Community Development Association.

Raising awareness about the United States’ inhumane immigration policies was a major goal of the event, but just as important was the opportunity it provided for personal reflection. All that walking gave us time to ponder hard questions: What does it mean to walk in solidarity with the immigrant

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Elsa Goossen (second from right) with other participants at Imperial Beach, CA, near the start of their journey

## Brenda's Story (cont.)

helped my mom, brother, and me become legal residents. It took ten years in total. All the trips to Denver and all the paperwork that had to be submitted finally paid off.

It has been ten years since I became a legal resident of the U.S. When my residential card was about to expire, I had to decide if I was going to take the next step. After passing the interview and taking the oath, I

finally became a U.S. citizen. It means more than words can ever explain. I can vote, fight for this country - my country - and be a proud citizen.

I sit here today and contemplate all that would not have been possible if it weren't for the people who helped me get to this great country. Thank you Mom and Dad for bringing me here, without which I would not have these opportunities of

a better life. Thank you to Flora Archuleta, because without her help and knowledge, my family and I wouldn't be where we are today. Most importantly, thank you to my grandfather, Baltazar Perez (may he rest in peace), for helping my family and me cross the Mexican border. I wish he was here to see this great accomplishment. I can now move forward and accomplish all my goals and dreams in life.

## El Camino del Inmigrante (cont.)

community? How can we work across racial lines to develop empathy with each other and change the culture of hate and xenophobia that exists in our current political context?

Some participants on the Camino were immigrants themselves, carrying memories of difficult journeys that they or their loved ones have endured. Many of us, though, will never fully comprehend the suffering generated by U.S. immigration and border policies. Among white U.S.-born citizens like me, the mild discomfort and blisters

that we experienced on the Camino were reminders of the privilege we carry in the United States, as well as the responsibility we have to develop a culture of welcome and solidarity.

Churches of many faith traditions modeled this hospitality for our group, inviting us into their sanctuaries for meals and a safe night's rest as we traveled through. I hope that people who migrate as a means of survival will increasingly experience the same welcome

that we did.

But a long journey awaits. When our group arrived in L.A., we held a rally outside of the Metropolitan Detention Center. Although we couldn't see any immigrant detainees through the tiny slits that serve as their "windows," we could hear them banging on the walls from the inside. Their message was clear: These walls are devastating our communities. Let's imagine a world that respects the dignity of every human being, and then shape that dream into our reality.



Participants rally outside the Metropolitan Detention Center before marching through downtown Los Angeles.

Photo: Aurelia Ventura/La Opinión



Activists raise their hands in support of immigrants inside the detention center, recognizing both their presence at the rally and their forced absence from our communities.

Photo: Aurelia Ventura/La Opinión



## After-School Program at Tierra Nueva Resumes for Fall Semester

Students living at the Tierra Nueva apartments for farmworker families receive individualized help with their homework, thanks to the IRC's after-school program at their housing complex. The tutors include Norma Gomez, a long-time organizer of the program, and Elsa Goossen, IRC's education coordinator.

The students range in age from kindergarten to high school, offering a chance for youth in different grades to learn from

each other. The program runs four days per week, and over time has helped students make progress in subjects like reading and math. In addition to the tutoring sessions, they recently enjoyed a swimming outing while the weather was still warm!

If you're interested in volunteering or supporting the program, contact Elsa Goossen at [elsa@slvir.org](mailto:elsa@slvir.org) or 719-587-3225 ext. 15.



Youth from Tierra Nueva enjoy spending a Saturday afternoon at Splashland in Alamosa.

## Get Out the Vote!

The Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) has identified the San Luis Valley as a key location for voter registration drives this fall before the upcoming election. The organization has hired two people to work locally in

Alamosa and Rio Grande counties. They are busy canvassing these communities, helping people register to vote, encouraging them to fill out pledge cards, and making sure that all eligible voters have the

information they need to make their voices heard in November.

Remember that the deadlines to register to vote in Colorado are Oct. 31 (online or through mail) and Nov. 8 (in person).

## Staff Completes Services Evaluation Training

IRC staff and board members gathered in September for a fundraising training with Mike Roque from Adobe Consulting. The session focused on tracking the services that IRC provides, in order to more

accurately evaluate their effectiveness and report them for grant purposes. Many of our clients walk in the door looking for legal advice, translation/interpretation, notarizations, and application

assistance, and the IRC plans to keep more detailed records of these informal services so we can better serve clients in the future and connect them with the resources they need.

## October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Please join the IRC and other local service providers in observing a month of advocacy and action. The IRC serves survivors of domestic violence through the Por Ti Mismo program, which helps eligible applicants seek legal permanent residency independent of their abusers. Individuals may submit a "self-petition" through the Violence Against Women Act, or apply for a special U-Visa geared toward crime victims more broadly.

For more information, contact Carmen Stevens at [carmen@slvir.org](mailto:carmen@slvir.org) or 719-587-3225 ext. 13.

**A LIFE FREE FROM VIOLENCE IS EVERYONE'S RIGHT.**



**UNA VIDA LIBRE DE VIOLENCIA ES TU DERECHO.**

## Intern Reflection - Gabriela Gonzalez

**Want to help support the mission of the IRC? Go to [www.slvirc.com](http://www.slvirc.com) and click on the Donate online link or drop by our office!**

I am very happy and grateful to be part of the SLVIRC as an intern. When deciding where to do my internship, I thought about where I could learn the most while giving back to my community. I ended up choosing the IRC because this organization helped me and my family immigrate to the United States 15 years ago.

I knew that the IRC offers programs that help immigrants, but I did not know how much they really care about the people they serve. I have been a part of the IRC for the past two months, and in that short period of time I have been able to see the hard work that is put into each case.

The IRC relies on donations and grants in order to continue providing services. Now, let's be real. Many donors do not want to support programs that help immigrants. When trying to get grants and donations, sometimes things do not go as planned, so one must



**Gabriela Gonzalez**  
IRC Intern

have the courage to move forward no matter what.

The IRC staff definitely has what it takes to provide adequate services to the immigrant community. The staff at IRC is hard-working, caring, and compassionate. Everybody that I know that has been provided a service by the IRC mentions how grateful they are and how the organization made an impact in their lives.

I am thankful to be given the opportunity to be part of this awesome organization. In these two remaining months of my internship I hope to learn as many skills as possible so that I can apply them wherever my career takes me.

### About Our Work:

The San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center (SLVIRC) is a unique organization with a long history of working with immigrants. It has served as an informal resource center for immigrants in the area since 1987. One of several programs created by San Luis Valley Christian Community Services, the Immigrant Assistance Program grew out of low-income immigrants' need for assistance in filling out essential applications for political asylum, amnesty, and other legal status. In February 2003, the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center received 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service, and is currently an independent non-profit located in Alamosa, Colorado, serving the entire San Luis Valley and beyond.

SLVIRC serves a geographically remote area in south-central Colorado, which is roughly the size of Connecticut. The area is home to more than 40,000 residents and 10,000 migrant and seasonal workers. The population is almost 50% Hispanic, and there are more than 400 Q'anjob'al Indigenous Mayan Guatemalans living in the San Luis Valley. It is one of Colorado's poorest regions, with much of the population living below the poverty level. Two of the valley's six counties are the poorest in the state and among the poorest in the nation. The majority of the clientele served are of Mexican or Guatemalan descent.

The IRC currently offers three programs in line with its mission. The first continues to be Immigration Legal Assistance, which assists immigrants in completing essential immigration paperwork. The second is Por ti Misma, through which the IRC assists battered immigrants and crime victims in achieving legal status. The third program is Punto de Vista, which provides English tutoring to adult immigrants, citizenship preparation classes, and an after-school tutoring program for immigrant children.



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