



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

## IRC Begins New Wave of English Classes

With the help of employee Laura Thompson, the IRC has been able to begin a new wave of English classes. Courses have been taught in the past by volunteers, but had been on a temporary break for a few months.

Laura had prior experience teaching English from working in Bosnia with elementary and middle school students as part of a multicultural summer program. This program also focused on bringing together kids from different backgrounds in a neutral setting to interact and have fun. She also taught several health-related lessons to English classes as she worked with refugees over the past few years.

In general, she feels that her seven years working with refugees helped to prepare her to teach English as she had constant interaction with people of varying levels of English. When Laura began working with the



Laura Thompson with her student Emilceth

IRC, she went to the Intercambio training in Boulder in order to become familiar with the materials the IRC uses and learn different techniques and ideas to use in the classroom.

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Laura, the new Immigrant Education Coordinator, began classes on March 2. Currently there are only a few students enrolled, but Laura is excited to take on more if the interest arises. Many different levels of English are offered under the current curriculum and Laura also does her best to accommodate student needs in terms of scheduling.

## IRC to Receive New Volunteer

The San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center has a long history of receiving volunteers. One of the long-standing relationships which has provided volunteers in the past, is Mennonite Voluntary Service. This is a program through which young adults come into a community for one to two years and work full-time at an organization there. Alamosa is lucky to have a well-established MVS unit which

has been serving this community for decades. The IRC has been fortunate to receive many volunteers in this manner in the past, including recent volunteer Roxanne Reimer who finished her two year placement this past August.

The IRC is now excited to welcome a new Mennonite volunteer who will be coming this fall and has committed to serving with the IRC for two years. Elsa Goossen

is from Topeka, Kansas and will complete her degree in Latin American Studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota this spring. Elsa has devoted a lot of time to learning about immigration issues and contributing to related causes and is excited to continue that journey with the IRC.

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# La Semana Santa

La Semana Santa, or Holy Week, is a time of many traditions, both in the United States, and elsewhere. In Latin America, La Semana Santa is a particularly special week.

In the United States, around this time of year, we see displays of colorful eggs and bunnies alongside large amounts of candy. Children are excited by the idea of a bunny running around and hiding eggs filled with candy.

Although we also have many religious traditions around this time of year, it would be rather difficult to grasp the religious roots of Holy Week by seeing the commercialized version of Easter. In Guatemala however, the religious traditions are much more obvious and

prominent.

Many schools in Guatemala take the entire week off to celebrate Holy Week and in many towns there are events each day of the week.



Sawdust carpet in Guatemala during Holy Week

These colorful carpets are often laid down before a procession and then the procession will walk over them. The most astonishing thing about them is what they are made out of. These

colorful and intricate carpets are made completely out of dyed sawdust and laid down by hand in the streets.

In each marketplace you will see people selling this sawdust during La Semana Santa. Antigua, Guatemala is particularly famous for their Holy Week celebrations and sawdust carpets.

The carpets and processions are certainly a sight worth seeing. So if you ever happen to be in Guatemala over Holy Week, be sure to check them out!

One of the most striking occurrences during La Semana Santa would be the "alfombras" or carpets that are made in the streets or churches of many towns .

**"An increase in the ability to communicate effectively helps to remove many of the barriers faced by our clients."**

## English Classes (cont.)

Intercambio is an organization in the Boulder area that works to build relationships across cultures through education. The IRC currently uses their English curriculum for their classes.

Laura feels that this work is important for many reasons.

She says that "An increase in the ability to communicate effectively helps to remove many of the barriers faced by our clients. Learning English enables immigrants to experience positive outcomes in many aspects of their lives – not just employment, but also

healthcare, education, and community involvement."

If you or a friend have interest in the English classes provided by the IRC or would like more information, contact Laura at (719) 587-3225 Ext. 12.



## New Volunteer (cont.)

In 2014 Elsa spent a semester participating in the Border Studies Program in Tucson, AZ, studying issues related to transnational migration and living with a Mexican-American host family. She felt privileged to work with the humanitarian organization No More Deaths, which provides water, food, and medical assistance to people crossing the dangerous Sonoran desert. This experience opened her eyes to the harsh realities of border militarization along the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as the immigrant justice activism occurring throughout southern Arizona and northern Mexico.

Elsa and her classmates also spent time traveling in Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico, learning about the root causes of migration, its effects on sending communities, and the ways that local people are resisting exploitation and finding

alternatives to the journey north. After returning to Macalester after these incredible learning experiences, she coordinated a mock border wall on campus to convey the urgency of global migration issues



**Elsa Goossen - future IRC volunteer**

and challenge our collective complicity in the violent system of border enforcement. Creating the installation, which included diverse artistic displays by students and staff, was an exciting process of community mobilization for border justice.

Elsa has chosen this posi-

tion for many reasons. In her own words, "I'm excited to join the IRC team as a legal assistant and direct my full energy to this important work! I admire the IRC's longstanding commitment to serving the San Luis Valley population with these vital resources, and feel honored for the opportunity to learn from people who navigate the complexities of immigration every day. As the U.S. political climate continues to evolve, I look forward to helping IRC clients connect with new legal opportunities and maintain agency over their lives. Laying the groundwork for immigrant justice is certainly a community effort, and I feel very lucky to be joining you all in that endeavor."

The IRC and its staff look forward to welcoming Elsa on board this fall and working with her in the upcoming years.

"I'm excited...to direct my full energy to this important work!"

## Santa Eulalia Festival

Saturday, February 7 was a day of celebration in the Maya community of Alamosa. Each year, the community honors the virgin of Santa Eulalia with a mass and a party.

There is always plenty of food and dancing during this celebration, as well as traditional marimba music. During the celebration, a new Santa Eulalia princess is crowned each year. This year, Angelina Baltazar was chosen as the Santa Eulalia princess.

In addition to the celebra-

tion and crowning of the princess, the Maya community chose to recognize some great work and commitment to the community. Flora Archuleta received an award from the Maya Q'anjob'al Espiritu Maya Community of Alamosa for 15 years of dedication and support to the Maya Community. Ellen Bauder and Betsey Downing also received an award for their continued support to the Maya Community.

A wonderful time was had by all. If you did not attend

the event this year, put it on your calendar for next year. It is a fun time and a great way to learn about the Maya community here in Alamosa!



**Angelina Baltazar - the new Santa Eulalia princess**

## Board Member Reflection - Patrick O'Neill

My name is Patrick O'Neill. I live and work in the San Luis Valley, a place that is my home and has been for many years. I am not an immigrant. The United States of America is where I was born and raised. But I do value greatly the work of the Immigrant Resource Center, so much so that I volunteer as a member of the Board of Directors of the organization.

Much of the IRC's work is done quietly. No glamour, not much in the way of fanfare, either. But many, many hours of staff time devoted to making sure the immigrants who arrive at our door can receive the best we have to offer. Would Christ request any less of us? My faith tells me He would not. When laws and policies on immigration are muddled, as they have been for too many years now, our staff does all it can within the law to accommodate the unique needs of the immigrant. A broken system, but the needs persist. The needs come in the form of human lives, in families that refuse to perish or to disappear at the whims of lawmakers from one group or another. The needs come in the

shape of immigrant families at wits-end, seeking assistance to gain permanence in the U.S. despite the onset of domestic violence. The needs come in the form of students seeking a way to keep studying, who truly are dreamers of a bright and wondrous tomorrow for this country, in this country. These are the folks the IRC gets to meet, gets to serve, gets to stand alongside. They are also the folks in your neighborhood, the kids playing beside yours, and the people who suffer and rejoice at many of the same things you do. Differences exist, cultural identity is important, where you're from shapes how you see the world and the language you use to talk about it. But that's the way our country is, and always has been.

There is another type of work which the IRC engages. This is the work of advocacy with immigrants and on behalf of immigrants, the work of empowerment. This is work that, by necessity, is not done quietly. Justice for the oppressed, as very often immigrants to our San Luis Valley have been oppressed and

continue to suffer oppression, is what drew me to the work of the IRC. No one of us would wish to be taken advantage of, and no member of God's lovely creation should be taken advantage of, independent of their country of birth. To be honest, this is the work that is most challenging for IRC to affect and to sustain with funded staff. Typically funding streams for non-profits like the IRC offer resources much more readily to provide stop-gaps, instead of funding programs aimed at empowerment. Still, within our region there is no other organization better suited to undertake this task than the IRC. Empowering immigrants to realize a good and dignified life is critically important work to continue, if we are to uphold our mission, our responsibility to those who arrive in search of IRC's assistance.

When I think about the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center, about the immigrants who seek out its services and its accompaniment, I think of these things. I most sincerely hope you do, too, and will support our mission in every way you can.

May we come to know as friends those in our midst!

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!

The San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center (SLVIRC) is a unique organization and has a long history of working with immigrants. It has been 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 has three programs working towards our 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 of the IRC is Punto de Vista, which provides English tutoring to immigrants, Spanish courses to community service providers, and an after school tutoring program for immigrant children.



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