



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

IRC Helps Local Mother Learn to Read

Rosalia is a local woman who has now lived in Alamosa for 13 years. She lives here with her husband. They now have four children who were all born in Alamosa. Rosalia also has a steady job here in town.

One day, Rosalia’s boss encouraged her to enter a program to get her GED, as she never graduated from high school. She was slightly embarrassed, but she had to inform her boss that she could not study to get her GED, as she had never learned to read and write. She was not given the opportunity to go to school in Guatemala, where she is from, and once she arrived in the United States, she was forced to find work rather than attend school. Her boss then encouraged her to visit the

IRC and see what the center could offer in terms of literacy courses.

Rosalia had spend years in another literacy program, however it was not suited to her learning needs or schedule. “I was almost going to give up,” she said. However, she visited the IRC anyway due to the encouragement of her boss. She was surprised at the one-on-one attention she received from staff at the IRC. “I came here, and they helped me learn.”

Rosalia remembers beginning with the ABCs the first day she showed up. She still had some difficulty with the alphabet and knowing which letters make what sounds at that point. Since then, she has progressed a lot.



Rosalia with two of her children and one of the women who helped her learn to read.

Rosalia is now able to read entire children’s books.

-See **Mother Learns to Read**, Pg 2

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The Presidential Mandate: How does it Work, and What does it Mean?

As most Americans are aware, President Obama recently issued a presidential mandate on immigration. This mandate follows a 2012 mandate affecting those without documentation who were brought into the United States as children. Although many know that a presidential mandate was made, few know what exactly it means, when it will take effect, what the process is and how it will

affect people.

The mandate made in 2012 was named DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). DACA did not give anyone legal immigration status, nor did it create a path to citizenship for anyone. What it did do was allow people who had entered the United States before the age of 16 and had resided here since June 15, 2007 a

way to get a work permit for two years. This also enabled anyone who qualified for DACA to get a driver’s license and Social Security card, which can be life-changing documents. Those approved for DACA are the lowest priority for deportation. DACA, however, left millions of people out.

-See **Presidential Mandate**, Pg 3

Las Posadas: A Christmas Tradition

The holidays are now over, and most of us have wrapped up our celebrations and holiday travels and returned to our normal lives.

During this season many of us have our own traditions and customs of our own. It is also interesting, however, to think about how other cultures celebrated this time of year.

There are many Christmas traditions all over the world, one of which is called *Las Posadas*. *Las Posadas* has origins in Spain, however today it is a tradition mainly practiced in Mexico and Guatemala. It is also practiced in the San Luis Valley by immigrants who choose to keep this tradition alive.

Posada translates to inn or

lodging. The tradition is centered around Joseph and Mary's search for lodging in Bethlehem. It is plural because the practice happens



multiple times. The event happens over nine days from December 16th until Christmas eve. A different house is designated for each evening and a procession of people make their way to the home with two people dressed as Joseph and Mary.

When the procession arrives

at the designated house, there begins a traditional song which is an exchange between the procession of people outside and those

that are inside. In the song, those outside are asking for lodging, while the people inside continually say no with various reasons. This goes on for several stanzas until Mary and Joseph are recognized and finally those outside are let into the house.

Those participating then have a party, often involving

traditional songs and prayers, food, music, piñatas, and even fireworks.

Las Posadas is a fun and interesting tradition which has changed very little over the years. It is certainly worth participating in if you ever get the chance.

“Rosalia sees many practical ways in which literacy will help her.”

Mother Learns to Read (cont.)

One day she hopes to be able to read faster and would also like to learn to read and write in Spanish. “I want to read more.” she says. She admits that she still thinks reading is hard, but she wants to keep going.

Rosalia also sees many practical ways in which literacy

will help her. Being able to read labels and signs at the grocery store and other everyday things would be much easier. Beyond that, with her children, Rosalia would like to be able to help with their homework and know how to fill out the forms and read the letters the school sends

home.

She says she has learned to never give up and is very thankful to the staff and volunteers at the IRC who have worked with her and helped her to learn.

Presidential Mandate (cont.)

The new mandate does not come anywhere close to covering all undocumented immigrants either, but it does extend the benefits of DACA further than before. Essentially, the mandate does two things. First of all it expanded DACA, increasing the number of people who qualify for it, and secondly, it put in place DAPA (Deferred Action for Parental Accountability).

Changes to DACA are fairly simple. In the 2012 version, applicants had to prove they had been residing in the United States since June 15, 2007. The date has now been moved to January 1, 2010, meaning that people who came to the United States between those two dates could potentially qualify for DACA, when they could not have before. DACA had also offered a work permit to those who were approved for two years, and it has now been increased to three years. The last major change to the criteria for DACA is the

removal of an age cap for qualifying. Previously applicants had to be between 15 and 30 years old at the date of their application to qualify. Applicants still must be 15, however no longer must be under any certain age. For those qualifying under the new guidelines who did not qualify before, it is estimated that applications will be accepted under the new criteria on February 18, 2015.

DAPA gives the same basic benefits as DACA, however it is targeted to an entirely different group of people. As the full title suggests, parents of children who do have documentation are the target of this mandate. In order to qualify you must be the parent of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident who was born on or before November 20, 2014. You must have lived in the U.S. since January 1, 2010, and have been present in the U.S. on November 20, 2014 as well as the date you apply on. DAPA is

not for anyone who had lawful immigration status on November 20, 2014 and all applicants must pass security and criminal background checks. The government expects to begin accepting applications under DAPA around May 20, 2015.

There is still no path to citizenship or even legal status for the millions of undocumented immigrants in this country, however, the new presidential mandate does extend the benefits of deferred action on deportation and work permission to many more people.

USCIS will be charging \$465 for both the DACA and DAPA applications, which is the same fee as was previously charged for DACA. Since 2012 the IRC has helped many young people apply for DACA and will also be preparing applications for DAPA once the government begins to accept them.

“DAPA...is targeted to an entirely different group of people.”

Guatemalan Leaders Discuss Executive Action

This past December a board member of the IRC and Guatemalan leader Francisco Lucas was given the opportunity to go on a trip to Tucson, Arizona. December 5 to 7 he participated in a trip planned by different Guatemalan leaders alongside the 11 Guatemalan consulates in the United States. Representatives from the Guatemalan government were present as

well.

The objective of the trip was to discuss the executive action taken by the president. They conversed about how Guatemala's Ministry of Foreign Relations can be helpful to the Guatemalan community in the United States during the implementation of this new mandate.

During this trip they also

had an opportunity to visit two immigration detention facilities, one of which was housing thousands of unaccompanied minors.

Francisco Lucas is a dedicated board member of the IRC and leader in the Mayan community. This trip was a wonderful opportunity for him to help the voices of the Mayan community be heard.

Board Member Reflection - Francisco Lucas, Board Member for 14 Years

Francisco Lucas has been on the board of the IRC for 14 years. He is also a leader of the Mayan community in Alamosa. Francisco volunteers as a board member because he thinks it is necessary and important to have representatives from the immigrant community and in particular the Mayan community on the board of an organization dedicated to serving immigrants.

The IRC is an organization that gives needed information and help to immigrants in our community. It helps those in need regardless of who they are or where they are from. The only problem Francisco sees is a lack of funding for the IRC, but he

trusts that the Alamosa community will step up to ensure this valuable organization can continue to operate.

Francisco's goal is to give immigrants a voice, not only at the IRC, but with the entire community, the au-



Francisco Lucas—Board member

thorities and the nation as a whole.

Francisco sees many ways in which the IRC helps the community. The center does many things beyond helping with immigration paperwork. It helps with many different needs that come up in the San Luis Valley. Domestic violence, education, language, physical needs, promotion of culture and ancestral music are just a few of the areas in which the IRC contributes.

Francisco thinks that the mission of the IRC is very important and is happy to have served on the board for so long and to continue serving in that way.

Want to help support the mission of the IRC? Go to 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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