



HAPpenings !

HISPANIC AFFAIRS PROJECT

We are an organization dedicated to the development of leadership, community organizing, and the provision of key services for the integration of the western Colorado community.

December 2015

If you drove down highway 135 on Saturday, October 31, you would have seen 50 or so humans and 20 dogs walking together, laughing, chatting, and celebrating the first annual Diversity Walk starting at Garlic Mike's and ending 6 Points in Gunnison for refreshments and more visiting.

Representing our community were those who hail from Mexico, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Argentina, Colombia, the Cora Indian tribe and many European backgrounds, all walking the two miles side-by-side getting to know one another. One participant rode her motorized wheel chair and there were other differently-abled on the walk. Ages ranged from infants in arms to 86 years old. Some walkers represented the LGBT community. There were many breeds of canines (all well-behaved).

We planned to walk rain, snow or sunshine and it turned out to be a wonderful Fall day.

Sponsors of this first walk celebrating Gunnison

First Annual Diversity Walk in the Gunnison Valley

Valley's diversity were UCC Crested Butte, Rumors, Donitas, 6 Points, and the Hispanic Affairs Project. Supporters included Living Journeys, UCC Gunnison, the Catholic Church, the League of Women Voters and all the participants.

If you missed this opportunity, we will walk again every year so we can get to know one another better and continue to celebrate our diversity.

Report by Katherine Norgard, a HAP member and veteran pilgrim of the Migrant Trail, which people walk each year along the Mexico-USA border to remember the hundreds of migrants and refugees who have crossed the border in search of work and peace.



Red de Colorado para Combatir el Trafico Humano/
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Labor Rights Victory for H2A Range Workers

After receiving pressure from HAP in a federal court, the Department of Labor (DOL) hastened to increase the salary of the H2A workers in the sheep herding industry.

As of November 16, more than 1,600 workers in Colorado and other states, achieved an increase in salary after 50 years of receiving an income of \$750 a month. This increase, although it does not reach the Federal salary requirements for all foreign workers in any industry in the United States, adds about \$8,755,200 to the overall annual pay.

The DOL has the responsibility to periodically review the salaries in all industries, however, because of a lack of public participation and opinion, and that of the workers themselves, the DOL continued with the same regulations over the last 50 years.

Ricardo Perez from HAP said, “Considering that the migrant workers of H2A can spend the rest of their working lives without collecting benefits, any improvement to their work conditions, such as salary, nourishment, health, and housing, is critical.” He also stated that “we are a small organization with limited resources, but we have had the capacity to make a positive impact in their lives, not only in the western region of Colorado, but in various states. Our migrant outreach program has documented many of the workers problems and we were able to show that to the public. Our mission is to promote justice and bring hope to our brothers. They themselves have said that the hardest part about working here is the solitude, and that our visits and words of encouragement are of great significance to them. There is still much to do so the workers may have work under better conditions, and may be treated with respect.”



“My name is Manuel and I am calling from... My coworkers and I have heard the news that the salary of the sheep herders has increased this month (November) and I am calling to thank you for doing that favor for us. I have been working for 9 years with that salary and I never thought I would get an increase. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for helping us.”—message from a worker to the HAP team.

On that same ranch there is a 67 year old who has worked there for 34 years with the H2A visa. Because of his age, he has decided to return to Peru. Although he has worked for so many years in this country, the lack of an adequate salary and lack of benefits, he returns to his country to live in poverty.

“Life in Peru is not cheap, like people may believe. 750 dollars here is the same as it is there. And with that amount we are not able to save any money.”—quote from a worker interviewed by PBS.



Immigration Legal Assistance is Helping Many Families

Since receiving Recognition and Accreditation on April 15, 2015 from the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), HAP has been working hard to provide high quality legal assistance to our low-income immigrant families.

Local leaders in Montrose, Grand Junction, and Gunnison have led monthly information sessions to let the community know about the importance of seeking high quality legal assistance, especially given the reality of predatory notaries or individuals operating across the Western Slope; over 800 people have been reached in these meetings. Families also receive valuable information about other local resources for housing, health care, public safety, education, driver's licenses, and more. As a result, over 65 families have received legal consultations,

HAP is the only organization authorized by the Department of Justice/USCIS, to assist with the applications for immigration, in the region of western Colorado. We especially focus on helping low income families and giving referrals for trustworthy immigration attorneys in Colorado.

Help us fight fraud in immigration!

Supporting the Dream of Becoming An American Citizen

The Hispanic Affairs project, through their legal immigration assistance program and the Welcoming Colorado campaign, is offering help to all those residents who qualify for citizenship through naturalization.

and many of those have received legal representation from HAP. Legal consultations allow families to accurately understand their situation, their options, and their risks.

To date, HAP has a 100% approval rating for cases submitted to USCIS, and the majority of HAP's practice is dedicated to DACA and Naturalization applications.

DACA applicants, often known as "Dreamers," have been able to go to college, get more stable jobs, pursue out of state opportunities, get driver's licenses and help their families attain financial stability.



Today, 9 million US residents are eligible to become citizens and they could be anyone of our friends or neighbors. A third of those eligible are of Mexican origin, with full time employment yet still living in poverty, with difficulties applying because of language limitations, lack of information, and the high cost of immigration applications. These new citizens could make a difference in the upcoming elections in 2016.



Our 2016 Legislative Priorities

The 8th Annual CIRC Assembly was an opportunity for member organizations throughout the state to vote on three priority campaigns that the Coalition should support in 2016.

The event took place in Silverthorne and over two hundred people attended, including HAP members and many representatives from the Western, Southern, Northern, Mountain and Denver-Metro Regions. The possible campaign choices presented at the assembly were increased access to driver licenses, IMPACT community trust legislation, administrative relief (DACA & DAPA), notary public fraud legislation, and an increase to the minimum wage. The campaigns that received the most votes were Driver Licenses, IMPACT, and Administrative Relief, so HAP looks forward to helping CIRC make these programs successful at the state level.

At the Assembly, HAP members worked with members of the other West Slope region groups: WCC, Organizing for Action Grand Junction, and Compañeros-Durango. We committed to start holding monthly conference calls for our four



organizations, which may help us coordinate efforts to drive people to DMV appointments, among other things.

The event featured workshops ranged in subject from information on refugees in Colorado to training members to document immigration abuses and using theatre to address difficult issues. The child and youth care provided art and culture lessons for the young people, allowing many parents who attended the Assembly to focus on the business of CIRC for the weekend. All this demonstrated that when institutions are created by the people for the people, they provide services that benefit the people. Report by Diego Rubalcava, Delta.

“IDrive Colorado”

On December 1, HAP and allies launched the “I Drive Colorado” campaign on behalf of the West Slope region. Led by CIRC, a network of organizations will introduce legislative proposals to resolve current problems with the implementation of SB-251.

With support from elected officials, business owners, faith communities, in addition to support from the office that oversees driver’s licenses (DOR-DMV), Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Colorado Sheriff’s Association, our committees will work together to improve community safety and correct the problems faced by Colorado residents when attempting to obtain a State identification card or a driver’s license. HAP has helped dozens of families to schedule an appointment to apply for the license, prepare for the written exam, and facilitate interpretation for the process. Nevertheless, “people may wait for



months to be able to get an appointment and the law has many contradictions, which end up excluding many immigrants, even though the cost is passed onto the applicants,” said Esther Saenz from the campaign team.

A Year of Great Victories!

2015 has been a very important year:

- ◆ After 3 years of preparation, we have obtained the accreditation allowing us to assist with immigration applications. We are the first organizations in this region of western Colorado who have been authorized by the Department of Justice to offer this service.
- ◆ We have also contributed to a modification in the political salary in the Department of Labor, once we proved that the laborers of H2A deserve a fair salary.



10 Years Making a Difference!

Next month, January, HAP will be celebrating 10 years of history. We began as an organization of immigrants, with the support of the church and allies, who saw the need of helping families with social integration. The conflicts in Central America in the 80's and the economic crisis in the 90's in Mexico, as a consequence of the free trade agreement (NAFTA), resulted in an increase in immigration to the United States.

As immigrants/refugees, each day we are grateful to this country for allowing us to work and giving the opportunity, to us and our children, to get ahead. Now, as we did before, we confront a refugee crisis because of similar circumstances. The compassion of this country is so great that victims will always have an opportunity here. It is the greatness of our new home: the United States of America.



Yes, I want to support HAP!

Our programs include:

1. Immigration Legal Assistance.
2. Migrant Outreach.
3. Combating Human Trafficking.
4. Welcoming Colorado Initiative.
5. Leadership Development.
6. Supporting Pro-Immigrant Policies.
7. Community Resource Center

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Make a check payable to **Hispanic Affairs Project** - 300 N. Cascade Avenue Suite C4 Montrose CO 81401

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