

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS CENTER Application to Serve on Oversight Committee

For 10 years the Employee Rights Center in City Heights has been providing education and advocacy to all workers regarding their workplace rights and benefits. Its offices are centrally located by the corner of Fairmount Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard and are open Monday through Friday 9 AM to 5 PM, allowing City Heights residents and all others to walk in at their convenience or call the Center's 24-hour message service.

As the only non-profit program in San Diego that is focused on workplace rights, the Center has helped thousands of low-income employees recover their unpaid wages, unemployment insurance, workers compensation, and other workplace benefits. These benefits are crucial in improving employees' ability to pay their rent, get access to health care when injured, to maintain their family's welfare, and to be self-sufficient. The Center uses over 20 local law student volunteers supervised by an attorney to deliver these services and further educate all employees about their workplace rights/benefits. The Center recruits a diverse cadre of law students of Latino, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent in order to have culturally competent services to immigrant communities.

Since 2004 the Center has also been helping immigrant workers get legal status, improve their immigrant status and become U.S. citizens, all fundamental needs in City Heights. It currently has a full-time immigration attorney, Ms. Sarah Plato, who is bilingual in Spanish and English. There are no other non-profit immigration services in City Heights serving its large, diverse immigrant populations who need convenient, low-cost service and education. By being here the Center is accountable to the community it serves.

The Center not only provides all these services at its Fairmount Avenue offices, it also provides education on workplace rights and immigration status at various community workshops currently being organized with community partners in the area. Its Program Coordinator, Mr. Alor Calderon, a native of Mexico and UCSD graduate, and its Community Organizer, Ms. Genoveva Aguilar, a San Diegan and USD graduate, lead this ongoing educational effort. City Heights residents, like San Diego residents in general, have a very limited understanding of employment, labor, and immigration law as it applies to their everyday situations. The Center staff, with its large cadre of law student volunteers, takes the time to provide education in the community so that all City Heights residents are empowered to improve their everyday lives through workplace justice.

The Center currently operates two grants from The California Wellness Foundation and Kaiser Permanente that help immigrant workers in our communities gain access to health care. Both grants are funding a community survey on access to health care that will be available to the public when finished. As part of these grants the Center seeks to help prevent workplace injuries and illness by introducing workplace safety and health training in the community for the many employees who do not get this training at work.

All these activities make the Center well-prepared to partner with others in City Heights in the 9-month planning process for TCE's "Building Healthy Communities Initiative."

We offer resources to help fulfill several roles in this process, to include: (1) mobilizing the community through outreach; (2) gathering data to support planning; and (3) helping to write the planning grant itself. We have expertise and staffing in all three areas.

First, Mr. Calderon and Ms. Aguilar have much experience organizing and leading community educational workshops that can relate to the community's real interests. Second, the Center has a large cadre of law student volunteers who have advanced research abilities to gather data that support the community planning process. Third, the Center's Founding Director, Peter Zschiesche, has 10 years of successful experience not only in grant-writing but also in grant monitoring and reporting back to the funders.

During the 9-month planning process the Center has the expertise and experience to help the community focus on numbers 2 and 3 of the 10 outcomes outlined by The California Endowment in its "Building Healthy Communities Initiative". **Outcome number 2** seeks families' improved access to "**healthy homes**" where health care is (among other things) accessible, comprehensive, culturally competent, family-oriented, and preventative. **Outcome number 3** seeks "**health and family-focused human services**" which include employment training and development, health services, and economic benefits eligibility and enrollment. The Center's activities support this focus as follows:

First, our ongoing health access surveys in City Heights will provide current data about how our residents access or do not access health care using their workplace benefits such as workers compensation, family medical leave, COBRA, state disability insurance, etc.

Second, the Center's education and advocacy about access to workers compensation insurance benefits for injured workers, family medical leave, paid family leave, state disability and unemployment insurance all gives City Heights residents economic benefits they need to help maintain their own and their families' finances and care at local health clinics. Its immigration services help insure that our resident immigrants know their rights to these benefits and their path to eventual U.S. citizenship.

Third, the Center's close relationship with the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council gives it special access to and knowledge of Labor's ongoing job training and placement programs that can lead City Heights residents to living wage jobs that include job security and advancement elements through collective bargaining agreements.

The Center's established base of City Heights residents are those that return for more services and who refer their family, neighbors and fellow workers about the Center. It also consists of the Hoover and Crawford high school students who volunteer their time at the Center for their schools' internships and act as translators for local residents. The Center gets continual feedback from all these residents as to their current needs and their desire to know more about their workplace rights and improved immigration status.

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