



Facing Immigration Fears: A Constructive Local Approach to Day Labor, Community, and Integration¹

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Executive Summary

As one of the most visible and vulnerable manifestations of the presence of Latino immigrants in “new destination” communities across the United States, day laborers have become a locus of conflict over the past fifteen years for local policy makers, advocacy organizations, and neighborhood residents. Communities have dealt with day labor in drastically different ways. Some have passed harsh anti-immigrant ordinances, hoping that a hostile environment will encourage immigrants to leave. Restrictionist state and local legislation, however, has proven costly to enforce, has been challenged in court, and has hindered immigrant integration. Other communities have gone against the restrictionist tide. This paper argues that organized day labor centers, such as the El Sol Resource Center in Jupiter, Florida, address many of the fundamental fears that polarize local policymaking and the national immigration reform debate. In Jupiter, El Sol has not only eliminated a controversial open-air labor market by bringing the process into a formal and organized structure, it has also provided access to English and civics classes, preventive health screenings and legal services in cases of wage theft. Furthermore, through El Sol the Town of Jupiter has opened a two-way process of immigrant integration. Jupiter’s day laborers are no longer “hiding in the shadows,” but rather are engaging in active citizenship and working with native-born community volunteers to run the center.

¹ Portions of this article are redacted from Lazo de la Vega, Sandra and Timothy J. Steigenga. 2013. *Against the Tide: Immigrants, Day Laborers, and Community in Jupiter, Florida*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Introduction

In early 2012 the prospects for the passage of comprehensive immigration reform in the United States looked as bleak as they had ever been. Despite promises to address the issue in his first term, President Obama continued to ramp up enforcement hoping to convince his critics that he was serious about border control. The first four years of the Obama administration saw record levels of deportations (nearly 400,000 per year) and unprecedented enforcement efforts such as the expansion of the Secure Communities Program.² At the state level, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures 1,607 immigration-related bills were introduced in 2011 (up from 1,400 the year before). Alabama (HB 56), Georgia (HB 87), Indiana (SB 590), South Carolina (S 20), and Utah (HB 497 and SB 288) passed laws similar to Arizona's SB 1070 (National Council of State Legislatures 2012). Together, these federal, state, and local "self-deportation" initiatives dominated the country's immigration agenda.

As the dust from the 2012 presidential election settled, one fact appeared abundantly clear; the ground had fundamentally shifted on the issue of immigration reform. The Latino vote as a percentage of the overall electorate increased from 9 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2012. According to the exit polls, President Obama won 71 percent of the Latino vote nationally, improving upon his 2008 performance of 67 percent (Lopez and Taylor 2012). The Latino vote was a key component of Obama's winning coalition in several swing states, including Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and even Virginia. Politicians and pundits from across the political spectrum have taken notice and the conventional wisdom on comprehensive immigration reform shifted from "impossible" to "very likely."

Even as discussion has turned from an exclusive focus on enforcement toward reform and a potential path to citizenship for certain unauthorized immigrants, a gaping hole remains in the national immigration dialogue on the issue of immigrant integration. While Congress debates the details of how much immigrants will be fined, how long they must wait, or which back-taxes they must pay, little attention has been paid to the vehicles and processes necessary to facilitate the integration of millions of immigrants into communities around the country. In other words, while there is much political maneuvering over how to negotiate the legal inclusion of previously unauthorized immigrants into the United States, questions about if, when, and how unauthorized immigrants will be socially included in American society have yet to be addressed.

The road to immigrant integration confronts important obstacles, particularly in "new destination" communities that have pursued restrictive policies that drive wedges between the native-born and Latino immigrants. While Congress may pass comprehensive immigration reform, this would not thereby eliminate the fears and images that the rancorous immigration debate has fostered. Though many of the estimated 11 million unauthorized people living in the United States are, as the President recently emphasized, "American in every way, but on paper," there are also many who are not. In new destination

2 Secure Communities is an information-sharing program between the DHS and the FBI. ICE states that Secure Communities prioritizes the removal of criminal aliens who are "the most dangerous and violent offenders." However, according to DHS, in 2011 twenty-nine percent of those deported were convicted of minor or "Level 3" crimes resulting in sentences of less than one year. Twenty-six percent of those deported had no criminal convictions (see Waslin 2011).

communities, unauthorized immigrants are frequently more recent arrivals who have lower socio-economic profiles and remain segregated (both spatially and socially) from the rest of the community. This is not because they reject American society, but because they live in places where they are feared, not easily accepted, and actively made to feel unwelcome.

While immigrant integration is a multi-faceted process that extends beyond the scope of this article, we focus on the barrier of common fears about immigrants, how those fears are frequently manifested in “new destinations” for Latino immigrants, and the costly and divisive restrictionist policies that foment and exacerbate such fears. This article examines the case of the Town of Jupiter, Florida where fears about immigrants have been mitigated through an organized day labor center. We argue that community centers such as the El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center³ in Jupiter represent examples of what remains missing in the national immigration discussion: integrative policies to provide a physical location and institutional mechanism at the local level where fears about immigrants can be overcome so that the two-way process⁴ of immigrant integration can begin to take place.

New Destinations and Fears about New Immigrants

Over the past 20 years, Latino immigrants have increasingly settled and found work in what immigration scholars now call “new destinations.” These are places that, unlike the traditional immigrant gateway cities of Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, have had little previous experience with immigrants. The Southeast and the Midwest experienced economic and population changes that attracted Latinos to work in construction, landscaping and other service industry jobs as well as in meat-packing, poultry and textile plants. New destination cities in areas characterized by a binary racial divide like Atlanta, Charlotte and even post-Katrina New Orleans have seen their Latino populations grow significantly since the mid-1990s (Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon 2006; Terrazas 2011; Massey 2008; Marquardt et al. 2011). For example, the Latino population of Franklin County, Alabama grew by 2,193 percent, between 1990 and 2000. Like other new destinations, Franklin County continues to be primarily “white” (92 percent as of the 2010 Census) and the influx of Latinos is very noticeable to established residents.⁵

Day laborers are one of the most visible and vulnerable manifestations of the presence of

3 The story of the founding of El Sol is detailed in *Against the Tide*. Portions of this article are redacted from the book, but the entire story of the center’s founding and its operations are not included in this brief article.

4 A “two-way process of immigrant integration” does not mean that the receiving society must fundamentally change itself in order to accommodate the needs and wants of immigrants; rather it means that host societies should be open and provide equal opportunities for newcomers. For example, it does not mean that the native-born in the United States must learn Spanish to accommodate Latino immigrants; rather, it means that Latino immigrants must learn English *and* the native-born should make opportunities and resources for learning English available to newcomers. In a report submitted to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the US Department of Health and Human Services, the ORR-convened Integration Working Group defined integration as “a dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers and the receiving communities intentionally work together, based on a shared commitment to tolerance and justice, to create a secure, welcoming, vibrant, and cohesive society” (Brown et al. 2007). See also *Communication from the Commission to the Council* 2003.

5 Between 1990 and 2010, the seven states which experienced the highest rate of growth of the unauthorized population (a combined 14-fold increase) were all in the southeast: Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky and Georgia (Warren and Warren 2013).

Latino immigrants in new destinations. Day laborers are usually young, foreign-born men who gather at a hiring site and wait for potential employers (mostly homeowners) to pick them up for temporary work assignments (Valenzuela et al. 2006). Such informal hiring sites frequently form outside home-improvement stores or along streets near residential neighborhoods, generating complaints about loitering, litter, and other health and human safety issues (Valenzuela et al. 2006; Valenzuela 2007). This combination of factors has made day laborers and hiring sites the locus of much of the conflict in new destination communities.

The presence of Latino immigrant day laborers ignites fears about immigration held by residents in new destinations and across the country (Chavez 2008). Polls in popular news organizations consistently show that the most common fears about immigration are that immigrants overburden government and social services, take jobs away from citizens, increase crime, pose a national security threat, and have the potential to change the culture of the United States (Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll 2010). When popularized by the media and exploited by politicians, fear has important policy impacts. In new destinations, the high visibility of day laborers makes these fears all the more palpable and local elected officials are frequently urged by frightened constituents to “clean up the streets.”

Over the past ten years, many local governments have responded by enacting ordinances intended to make everyday life difficult for immigrants, hoping that they will “self-deport.” To a significant degree, these local ordinances are symbolic measures taken by local politicians, often with consultation or direct assistance from national restrictionist organizations such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), intended to “send a message” both to constituents (that something is being done) and to Washington (that something should be done) about immigration. Hazleton (Pennsylvania), Prince William County (Virginia) and Riverside (New Jersey) are examples of the dozens of communities that have passed local immigration enforcement legislation in recent years. In 2012 alone, localities in 44 states and Puerto Rico enacted 267 immigration-related laws and resolutions, which is a *decrease* from the 306 laws and resolutions enacted the previous year (National Council of State Legislatures 2012).

During this same time period, some communities have gone against the anti-immigrant tide and instead adopted more integrative policies (Varsanyi 2010, 3). Jupiter, Florida, is one such community where local government partnered with civil society organizations to open a resource center where day laborers could wait for work (thus effectively answering the calls to remove the day laborers from the streets) and also access educational and social services that facilitate the two-way process of immigrant integration.

The Opening of Jupiter’s El Sol Resource Center

Jupiter is a wealthy community 90 miles north of Miami. Like other small, new destination communities throughout the Southeast, Jupiter experienced significant economic and population growth in the late 1900s and the 2000s that was correlated with an influx of immigrants from Central America and Mexico. The 1990 Census put Jupiter’s population at 24,986, of which less than 3 percent was Hispanic. By the 2000 census the population had grown to 39,328, with a Hispanic population of 7 percent. The 2010 Census put Jupiter’s population at just over 55,000 residents, almost 13 percent of whom were Hispanic. This

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rapid growth was fueled by the development of a number of planned communities, creating an increased demand for construction workers, landscapers and other service industry labor. Soon after immigrants arrived in Jupiter, an open-air labor market formed in front of apartment complexes in an immigrant neighborhood. By 2001, town authorities and the local police began fielding complaints from neighbors about noise, traffic, litter, and other health, human safety, and quality of life concerns related to day labor.

From 2001 until 2006, the issues of immigration and day labor became intertwined in Jupiter. The first step toward opening a day labor center was taken by immigrants themselves. Immigrant leaders initially mobilized around cultural issues, collaborating with the university to celebrate the *Fiesta de Candelaria*, the most important festival from the primary migrant-sending region of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. The process of organizing the fiesta in 2001 initiated the revitalization of a migrant hometown association that would eventually become the non-profit organization Corn-Maya, Inc. Corn-Maya, in turn, opened a pilot day labor initiative in a small storefront, housing many of the programs and services that would eventually become central to El Sol.

In the creation of a center, the immigrant community did not mobilize in isolation. It sought and found connections with non-immigrant Jupiter residents and community groups. A coalition of immigrants, community residents, the local Catholic Church, and students and professors from Florida Atlantic University formed and lobbied for the creation of a center to address the local quality of life issues raised by the open-air labor market. These educational and religious institutions became crucial bridges for the community, providing resources and garnering support from students, residents, and parishioners. The university contributed faculty with technical and language skills who served as liaisons with the immigrant community. The St. Peter Catholic Church began offering Spanish language masses and brought in a Spanish-speaking priest and nuns who played key roles in building trust in the community. Representatives of Jupiter's Democratic Club served as key organizers, forming a coalition, "Friends of El Sol," that conducted research, strategized, and informed local government representatives about the labor center model. As Father Don Finney, the priest who formed part of the coalition explained, "It is almost like a case study in strategic alliances. If the church tried to do this alone, it wouldn't work. If Corn Maya tried to do this alone, it wouldn't work. If the town tried to do it alone, it wouldn't work. It had to have all the players there, each bringing their piece of the puzzle."

Opponents also mobilized in Jupiter. In 2004 representatives of FAIR met with center opponents and provided them with talking points for letters and statements to the Town Council advocating a restrictionist local approach. Ultimately, however, the Town Council voted in favor of a center in 2005. When Catholic Charities stepped up and pledged financial support for the first year of the center, the stage was set for an alternative policy. In contrast, in July 2006, as Jupiter was preparing to open El Sol, many communities were continuing on the restrictive route. Hazleton, PA enacted the Illegal Immigration Reform Act Ordinance. Following Hazleton's lead, Riverside, NJ passed a similar ordinance aimed at unauthorized workers. One year later, in July 2007, Prince William County, VA adopted similar measures. In all three cases, the results compare unfavorably with even the short-term outcomes in Jupiter.

An Expensive Response to Fear

The Hazleton Illegal Immigration Relief Act Ordinance is one of several anti-immigration pieces of legislation that have been enacted at the local level (Campbell 2007; McKanders 2009) largely in response to the perceived threat of Latino immigrants. In 2006, while preparing to enact Hazleton's local policy, then-Mayor Lou Barletta explicitly outlined that fear was a primary impetus behind the restrictive ordinance. In a speech aired on CBS, Barletta said, "That's why I took action. I saw my city gripped by fear. Because of violent acts committed by illegal aliens, my residents were afraid to shop—or even drive—on certain streets."

The Hazleton Illegal Immigration Relief Act Ordinance reflects and reaffirms common fears about the unauthorized. In order to free residents of Hazleton of the "debilitating effects on their economic and social well-being imposed by the influx of illegal aliens," the city instituted fines of one hundred dollars a day for landlords who rented property to individuals who could not produce Social Security cards or other forms of identification to corroborate their immigration status. Businesses risked losing their local commercial licenses if they hired an unauthorized worker, and were also charged with checking the immigration status of all subcontractors. The ordinance also required that all government business be conducted in English (Hazleton Ordinance 2006-18 Illegal Immigration Relief Act Ordinance).

Soon after enacting the original versions of the immigration-related ordinance, and under pressure from several groups questioning the constitutionality of the new laws, Hazleton began scaling back. The scaled-back versions of the ordinance were still discriminatory, however, and lawsuits soon followed. The Hazleton ordinance was successfully challenged in court at the district and appellate levels and never went fully into effect. Estimates of the amount of money that Hazleton has already spent and will continue to spend defending what is left of the ordinance in court range from \$2.8 to \$5 million (Martinez 2011, 4).

Like the Hazleton Illegal Immigration Act Ordinance, the Illegal Immigration Relief Act in Riverside, New Jersey, explicitly cites the same fears about immigrants, stating that,

Illegal immigration contributes to negative impacts on our streets and housing, negatively impacts our neighborhoods, subjects our classrooms to overcrowding and puts distend [*sic*] demands on our schools edging our schools to fiscal hardships, leads to higher crime rates, adds demands on all aspects of public safety jeopardizing the public safety of legal residents and diminishes our overall quality of life. (Riverside Ordinance 2006-16 Illegal Immigration Relief Act)

The Riverside ordinance included fines of between one and two thousand dollars for landlords "harboring illegal aliens," revocation of licenses for businesses that were found employing unauthorized workers, and even potential jail sentences. Riverside's ordinance went even further, stating that any business in the United States (not just in Riverside) that "aided and abetted" the unauthorized was to be subject to penalties.

As in Hazleton, Riverside's ordinance proved costly. Riverside faced legal challenges almost immediately after passing its immigration ordinance. Within a year it rescinded the ordinance, but by then the small town of less than ten thousand residents had already spent

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more than eighty thousand dollars in legal fees. The cost to Riverside went well beyond the legal fees. The Riverside Coalition of Business Owners and Landlords estimates that 75 percent of the immigrant population left the town and 45 percent of local businesses closed as a consequence (Martinez 2011, 16-17).

Virginia's Prince William County enacted a similar ordinance, but had to scale it back significantly after facing threats of legal action and opposition from within, especially from its own police chief. Eventually the county signed a memorandum of agreement to participate in the Secure Communities program, which in practice is very similar to the county's scaled-back resolution and makes it essentially redundant. Nonetheless, Prince William County spent \$1.3 million in start-up costs and continues to spend \$700,000 annually to maintain a police unit specializing in "criminal aliens" (Martinez 2011, 18). A report evaluating the outcomes of the ordinance commissioned by the county found that the policy had "seriously disrupted police-community relations in the county, at least temporarily" (Guterbock et al. 2010). The report went on to note that the ordinance had resulted in a significant negative impact on Latinos' trust in county government, desire to live in, and perception of, life in the county. Among its conclusions, the report stated that "the policy created fear and a sense of being unwelcome among immigrants in general" (xvii).

A Practical and Affordable Model

Jupiter, Florida has gone against the anti-immigrant tide that swept over Hazleton, Riverside, Prince William County, and many other communities around the country. Jupiter did not attempt to use local policy to make symbolic statements about national immigration policy. Jupiter is not a "sanctuary city,"⁶ as anti-immigration groups (such as FAIR) are apt to claim. The police in Jupiter collaborate with immigration authorities when asked, and there are no local ordinances prohibiting the Jupiter police from asking anyone about his or her immigration status. Jupiter has not had to spend millions of dollars defending itself against lawsuits for implementing unconstitutional anti-immigrant ordinances. Instead, Jupiter opted to allow a coalition of immigrants, local residents, students, and town representatives to come together to mediate community tensions by moving the informal labor market and associated problems to an organized structure. The El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center costs Jupiter taxpayers almost nothing and returns an estimated one million dollars in services annually to the local community (El Sol 2011 Annual Report).⁷

El Sol provides a critical bridge between the immigrant and native populations of the town. Within a few years, the town not only found a positive solution to the very real

6 "Sanctuary Cities" usually prohibit the use of municipal funds and resources to assist ICE. They also do not collect or share information related to residents' immigration status. San Francisco is one such "sanctuary city" as per Ord. 375-89, App. 10/24/89. <http://www.sfcityattorney.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=485>. The term "sanctuary city," however, is frequently used by anti-immigrant groups to express their contempt at cities that are not in fact "sanctuaries," but rather have community policing policies (Tramonte 2012).

7 El Sol operates with an annual budget of approximately \$300,000, all of which comes from private donations and grants. The Town of Jupiter contributes by renting out the building where El Sol operates for a symbolic amount of \$1 per year. In 2012 El Sol contributed services with an estimated value of \$1,306,000 to the community.

neighborhood and quality of life problems that many new destinations face, but also began to lay the groundwork for a long-term process of immigrant integration. The primary goal when it opened in 2006 was to get day laborers off the street. In this respect, the center succeeded and has grown beyond the expectations of its founders and supporters.

Today, El Sol is an established social service agency that enjoys widespread support among Jupiter residents, local media, and politicians (Lazo de la Vega and Steigenga 2013). Open seven days a week, El Sol's mission is framed in terms of improving the quality of life for all of Jupiter's residents. El Sol pursues this mission by organizing and supervising the day labor market in a controlled and sanitary atmosphere, educating day laborers and contractors about their rights and responsibilities, assisting immigrants to become an active and integrated part of the larger community, building bridges between Jupiter's different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, and providing occupational training, language and literacy instruction, counseling, health education, and legal and other services to individuals in need. El Sol provides both a critical set of services for immigrants and a way for local residents who volunteer at the center to conceive of immigration in more human terms. Since El Sol was founded in 2006, three other labor centers have opened in South Florida based on the El Sol model. Although one of those centers recently closed (in Lake Worth), El Sol continues to receive requests from other localities about its practices and programs. The center is now a fixture in the Jupiter community.

Alternative Responses to Fear

The El Sol Center provides an alternative model for local policy makers who seek to respond to the fears and concerns that an influx of Latino immigrants generates in new destinations. One specific fear about Latino immigrants is that they are not assimilating properly and in particular not learning English quickly enough. A group of protesters who gathered each Saturday outside El Sol during its first years of operation frequently held up signs demanding that immigrants "learn English" and decrying the need to "press 2 for English." Ironically, while they were demanding that El Sol shut down, they ignored the fact that every year hundreds of people learn English at El Sol.

There are three English programs at El Sol, and in 2010 almost three hundred students increased one level in their English proficiency. El Sol's clients are eager to learn English; in a 2011 survey, 80 percent stated that classes should be mandatory, 84 percent noted that participating in the English classes at El Sol has made their lives in Jupiter easier, and 80 percent felt that their improved English has also improved their job prospects. These figures reflect studies showing that today's immigrants are learning English at a rate faster than in previous generations (Jimenez 2011; Fischer and Hout 2006, 43).

Access to medical care and other social services remains one of the most salient immigration-related issues for the American electorate and lawmakers. One of the sticking points in the debate over immigration reform has been whether immigrants will receive benefits under the Affordable Care Act. Across the United States, the majority of the unauthorized immigrant population is uninsured and lacks sufficient access to preventive care. In Jupiter, El Sol has a Health Committee, which addresses many of these needs by providing early screenings, preventive care, health referrals, and health education. In 2012, El Sol partnered with the Health Department and a local hospital to open a joint volunteer clinic. In its first year

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of operation the clinic served over 500 low-income, uninsured patients. El Sol's Health Program also referred over 700 clients to other local health service providers in 2012 and held more than 40 workshops on topics ranging from cancer prevention to mental health, nutrition and women's health. While El Sol is not in a position to provide health insurance to the client population it serves, it is on the front lines of preventive health services and thus reduces costs to local emergency rooms by preventing or avoiding unnecessary visits and referring clients to available health services.

Another popular charge against immigrants is that they drive down wages and make it impossible for the American worker to compete. The biggest protest in opposition to El Sol was the 2009 "Save the American Worker Rally," during which protesters argued that El Sol was undermining the ability of American citizens to get jobs. It is hard to dispute that in open-air day labor sites where work is often scarce, immigrants may accept extremely low wages in order to secure a day's work. A nationwide study found that on average day laborers earn less than fifteen thousand dollars annually, putting them below the poverty line (Valenzuela et al. 2006, 12). The same study found that 49 percent of day laborers had been denied payment for work they had already completed and 48 percent had been underpaid.

While El Sol does not directly negotiate wages with employers, the simple fact that employers have to register at the center encourages higher wages and deters wage theft. Workers at El Sol also have access to legal assistance in cases of wage disputes with employers. In 2012, El Sol's legal program assisted individuals in 372 cases, 45 of which were related to work and wages (though none of the wage disputes arose from workers who were matched with employers via El Sol). Furthermore, the fact that the hiring process is ordered and managed by El Sol discourages the race to the lowest possible wage among workers common to open-air hiring sites. Although the center does not formally set wages, the Workers' Council and volunteers suggest fair wage rates for employers and employees based on the number of hours to be worked and prevailing local wages for landscaping, moving, painting, and other temporary employment opportunities that characterize the majority of job requests at El Sol. In a 2011 survey of El Sol clients, 91.6 percent of workers who got a job through El Sol reported feeling safer and better paid than if they had gotten a job on the street. Thus, moving workers from the street to El Sol has likely increased local wage rates rather than driven down wages in the day labor market.

A related concern with immigrant labor is the fact that unauthorized immigrants are often subject to abuse and mistreatment, which is not only a problem for them, but also lowers standards for other workers. In other words, employers who do not wish to uphold basic labor standards prefer to hire immigrant workers who they believe are less willing or able to file complaints. Immigrant workers, and especially day laborers, are indeed subject to several forms of abuse above and beyond wage theft. A study of day laborers found rampant abuse: 44 percent of day laborers had been denied food, water, and breaks by their employers; 32 percent had worked more hours than agreed to with the employer; 28 percent had been threatened or insulted by the employer; 27 percent had been abandoned at the work site by an employer; and 18 percent had been subject to violence by their employer (Valenzuela et al. 2006, 14). The anonymity that the informal labor market provides employers facilitates these abuses. Such anonymity is eliminated by El Sol. Employers

must register, and they are therefore more likely to uphold basic labor standards. The day labor market may continue to be relatively unregulated, but El Sol provides workers with access to resources through which they can report abuses, and in most cases this knowledge is sufficient to curb mistreatment on the part of employers.

Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, the American public continues to associate immigration with crime.⁸ The mere presence of unauthorized immigrants in the United States serves for many as evidence of a general disregard for American laws, and thus the cognitive leap from “illegal immigrant” to “criminal” becomes an easy one to make. The perception of high immigrant involvement in gangs, drugs, and other criminal activity is prevalent in media portrayals of immigration (Media Matters 2008) and often at the root of the fear that divides communities. In fact, unauthorized immigrants who are afraid of contact with the police are often the victims of crimes which they are unlikely to report (see Marquardt et al. 2011, 136-138). Day laborers are especially susceptible to crime because they are paid in cash and are unlikely to have bank accounts. El Sol’s financial literacy programs address this issue by encouraging workers to open and use bank accounts.

More important, El Sol has become a trusted community institution where immigrants can feel safe talking to the police and other authorities to report crimes, thus making it more likely that criminals will be caught and removed from the Jupiter community. In combination with more aggressive code enforcement and community policing, the Jupiter police department has had significant success in removing criminal elements from the community. Throughout the year the police make several presentations at El Sol, ranging from practical issues such as bike safety to warnings about unscrupulous notaries or other criminals. According to the 2010 *Uniform Crime Report* of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the number of violent crimes reported in Jupiter dropped by a third since El Sol opened in 2006. Furthermore, El Sol is a physical manifestation of the growing trust in the community. The latest (2011) Town of Jupiter Citizen Survey asked residents to rate the sense of community: 78 percent of respondents said that the “sense of community” in Jupiter was “good” or “excellent,” and 74 percent said that Jupiter was open and accepting towards people of diverse backgrounds—scores significantly higher than state and national averages on these measures (Jupiter Citizen Survey 2011, 35).

The improved relationship between the police department and the immigrant community brokered by El Sol is a great benefit, but El Sol does much more to make Jupiter a safer place to live. As of March 2011 more than 2,000 people were registered at the center. Each member has picture identification with personal information, address, nationality, and other data on the card. El Sol identification cards are recognized by the local library and other public and private organizations in the area. Information about each member’s job skills, positions worked, and employer feedback is also stored in the center’s database. El Sol’s clients are no longer “living in the shadows.” Immigrants who live in Jupiter feel safe providing their personal information to El Sol. The logical result is that it would be more difficult for someone looking to “hide” in the shadows to do so in Jupiter. Because workers must register at El Sol, criminal aliens would be deterred from seeking work in Jupiter. Furthermore, because immigrants now have a more open and trusting relationship

⁸ A variety of studies have debunked the popular belief that criminality is more common among the foreign-born. For examples, see Sampson 2008; Rumbaut and Ewing 2007.

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with local authorities, the immigrant community itself is more likely to report the presence of such individuals in its midst.

While Jupiter is not a sanctuary city and does not issue its own identification cards, the town is not alone in pursuing positive, practical responses to managing the problems generated by antiquated and inadequate national immigration policies. More than sixty cities around the country have issued local “limited cooperation” ordinances between local police and immigration authorities in non-felony crimes (Varsanyi 2010, 3). More than a hundred other communities around the country have opened day labor hiring sites, such as the one in Jupiter, Florida (Fine 2006, 3). As the tide of restrictive state and local legislation begins to ebb, it is possible that more inclusionary alternatives will find space to grow. Although each local community struggling with day labor and other immigration-related issues is different, many of the lessons from the Jupiter experience are applicable to other communities.

Reframing Immigration

In essence, El Sol’s success in Jupiter is about the practical management of real problems and the human interactions that take place on a day-to-day basis between immigrants and the native-born to address those problems. Board members, volunteers, and staff at El Sol do not speak with one voice on immigration policy, but they do share an understanding of the human dimensions of the issue and an appreciation for the complexities of immigration and the immigration debate. El Sol’s volunteers, staff, and community supporters come face-to-face with the daunting hurdles confronted by unauthorized immigrants in their daily lives. One day it is a mother who arrives at the center in tears because she has been stopped for driving without a license while taking her children to school and fears picking them up because she will have to pass the same officer stationed outside the school. The next day it is a young man asking for help translating court documents related to his immigration case. No matter the issue, volunteers, employees, and the workers themselves are constantly confronted with the reality of the impediments that being unauthorized places on the process of integrating into society.

In 2012, El Sol brought workers and employers together with 140 active volunteers who served in the kitchen, employer desk, English and literacy classes. In this sense, El Sol serves as a bridge across the social distance that otherwise separates immigrants from the native-born in Jupiter. Because Jupiter attracts many retirees, El Sol’s volunteer corps reflects a broad spectrum of human capital from the local community, including volunteers with experience in hospitals, schools, universities, churches, and other non-profit organizations. More than 60 percent of El Sol’s volunteers are over the age of 60 and almost 10 percent are local students. On the other hand, the average El Sol worker is 40 years-of-age and has very little education: 60 percent of El Sol users have only completed primary school. Nowhere else in Jupiter do these vastly different groups come together so frequently to work collaboratively on common goals.

Some of the most successful stories at El Sol are those of clients who have transitioned to become volunteers. Ulysses is a young man who was seventeen when he arrived at El Sol for the first time. Though he did not find work at first, he attended English classes

and forged a lasting bond with one of El Sol's key volunteers. With the assistance of the volunteer, Ulysses was able to learn English, complete his high school education and has started taking college courses. Today, Ulysses teaches his own English classes at El Sol. As Ulysses explains:

My life would be completely different without El Sol. I am a volunteer now at El Sol, I have made that transition. I went from user to user and volunteer. I love it so much. Later I started teaching the beginning English class. The first day I remember I got there very early, with all my things. I was well-prepared. The students started coming in. When everyone was already there, I wrote my name on the board. I saw the expression on their faces: "What is this guy doing there?" They were probably expecting some blond guy with light eyes, so they were surprised when I told them I was going to be the instructor. Little by little I earned their trust. The class was great. I had nine students. I remembered when I was in the same classroom as a student, and now I was a teacher.

El Sol cannot issue Florida driver's licenses or change immigration laws, but it can and does assist immigrants as they negotiate the many barriers to integration in a new destination such as Jupiter. The Family Literacy program helps mothers to negotiate the complicated bureaucracy of the Palm Beach County school system. Access to public services, the library and the banking system for new immigrants opens pathways for language and financial literacy. Civics training and code compliance education not only help new immigrants to avoid code violations but also help them to become more engaged residents of Jupiter. Opportunities for service in community cleanups and property restoration through El Sol provide an increased sense of ownership and belonging in the community.⁹ Through El Sol, the town's new immigrants are beginning to feel that they belong in Jupiter and Jupiter belongs to them. This provides an opportunity for Jupiter to evolve as a single and more unified community, rather than a community divided by fear and mistrust. No matter the outcome of immigration reform proposals at the national level, Jupiter will be in a better position to positively integrate its immigrant community than localities that have chosen a punitive route.

Moreover, the enforcement-only approach of Hazleton and similar communities does not move the immigration debate in any direction. The costly and symbolic ordinances adopted in Hazleton and elsewhere may deflect immigrants to other areas, but they are unlikely to cause them to leave the country. Given the sacrifices immigrants have made to get to the United States, and the fact that many unauthorized families are rooted in the United States via children or family members who are citizens, many are here to stay. Those who stay may carry a distinct sense of alienation and rejection. The process of integration for these immigrants will be slow and difficult. If we conceive of the United States as an efficient immigrant integration machine, the punitive local enforcement initiatives witnessed around the country are rapidly draining the oil that lubricates the moving parts. The country will be left to deal with the consequences of a persistent and potentially oppositional and racially-defined underclass. Jupiter's experience with El Sol shows the viability of practical local solutions that effectively address real problems, reduce fear and alienation, and have the

⁹ More detailed information about El Sol's multiple programs, including its community service projects are available online at El Sol's website at http://friendsofelsesol.org/?page_id=50.

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potential to move the national immigration debate forward in a productive way.

First, El Sol is a logical answer to the many real tensions that arise in communities undergoing rapid socio-demographic and economic change. El Sol has improved the quality of life in the neighborhoods where tensions began. Today, hundreds of day laborers no longer line Center Street and complaints about public nuisances, littering, overcrowding, and code violations have all decreased. From the perspective of town authorities, El Sol has exceeded expectations in terms of overcoming the practical quality of life issues it was created, in part, to address. Jupiter's Town Manager Andy Lukasik explains:

The issue for us was quality of life and making sure that we addressed everybody's needs and still have the appropriate respect for people as human beings. It was a difficult balance for people. I never claimed to want to solve immigration. It is not our issue to solve.

Father Don Finney also highlights the quality of life issues. As he put it:

It cleaned up the look on Center Street. They put [up] the nice lamp posts and everything so that when you drive through it looks better. I think everyone in Jupiter takes a certain pride. . . . This is a pretty place. It is a nice place to live, and it has that nice quality. The schools are good. This is a nice place. Maybe even if you weren't sold on El Sol at the beginning, you will still like that it has solved the neighborhood problem of people standing around making it look bad.

Although the town has a no-solicitation ordinance on the books, the transition to El Sol has been so effective that to this day the ordinance has never been actively enforced by the police department.

Second, El Sol brings immigrants and the native-born together in a way that reduces the set of generalized fears that stymie productive discussions about immigration. As Jupiter residents come to better understand the forces propelling immigration, the challenges faced by immigrants, and the contributions they make to the community, many of those fears dissipate as the human face of immigration begins to emerge.

Finally, the process of reducing fears and bridging differences takes place in two directions, as immigrants also begin to feel more welcome and they make personal connections with volunteers, employers, and neighbors in an environment that was previously closed and even hostile. Ulyses, the young man who transitioned from being a client to a volunteer at El Sol, explains his experience:

I feel so safe at El Sol, 100 percent. I feel welcome at El Sol. I feel welcome in Jupiter because of El Sol. Beyond the work the volunteers do . . . the town was also supportive. In the building of El Sol, inside, I feel like I am at home. I know so many people there . . . [and] the volunteers are my good friends. I say hi, we hug; it is a great family. I am very comfortable there.

Conclusion

Comprehensive immigration reform remains a moving target. During the spring of

2013, the target began moving with exceptional speed. The Senate and President laid out their ideas for comprehensive immigration reform that included a path to what both called “earned citizenship” for unauthorized immigrants. The proposals currently being discussed involve several steps to earned citizenship. At minimum, potential beneficiaries of comprehensive immigration reform will have to show evidence that they have learned English, determine how much in taxes they should pay on past income, and clear a number of other administrative requirements. While immigrants in traditional gateway cities will have access to well-established networks of support and advocacy organizations to facilitate these processes, immigrants in new destinations, particularly in those localities that have passed restrictive legislation to isolate immigrants and pressure them to leave, will find the process onerous. Immigrants in Jupiter, however, already have a place where they have been taking English classes, have established trust, can ask questions and get appropriate help with navigating the system. In Jupiter, immigrants have a logical place where they can begin to emerge from the “shadows,” but the administrative process is just the beginning.

In the President’s January 2013 speech at Del Sol High School in Las Vegas, he hinted at the work yet to be done:

But I promise you this: The closer we get [to comprehensive immigration reform], the more emotional this debate is going to become. Immigration has always been an issue that enflames passions. That’s not surprising. There are few things that are more important to us as a society than who gets to come here and call our country home; who gets the privilege of becoming a citizen of the United States of America. That’s a big deal. When we talk about that in the abstract, it’s easy sometimes for the discussion to take on a feeling of “us” versus “them.” And when that happens, a lot of folks forget that most of “us” used to be “them.” We forget that.

At El Sol, the discussion about who is included as a member of our society is much less abstract. Every year hundreds of native-born residents of Jupiter share their lives directly with Jupiter’s immigrants. The exchange between them challenges the more abstract rhetorical exchange outlined by the President. In Jupiter, some residents have started the process of remembering when they used to be “them,” and more importantly, they have engaged in the process of negotiating a wider definition for “us.”

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