

# La Voz de Esperanza

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- Opinions expressed in La Voz are not necessarily those of the Esperanza Center.

## La Voz de Esperanza

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Articles due by the 8th of each month

## Policy Statements

\* We ask that articles be visionary, progressive, instructive & thoughtful. Submissions must be literate & critical; not sexist, racist, homophobic, violent, or oppressive & may be edited for length.

\* All letters in response to Esperanza activities or articles in La Voz will be considered for publication. Letters with intent to slander individuals or groups will not be published.

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# Elva's story: Regreso al Westside

On my recent return to San Antonio I discovered ESPERANZA. Through them I am rediscovering my own Westside San Anto. The work ESPERANZA initiates in the Westside barrio preserves buildings, records oral histories and documents, through artistic and building preservation projects, — the urban Chicano culture that was developed over hundreds of years and has culminated in the modern music, art, and architecture that is, the Westside. Taking a retrospective look at the San Antonio I left, and the San Antonio to which I return, I can say that I and my cohorts left because nobody wanted us, nobody claimed us.

My generations of queer artists left San Antonio in the early to mid-80's because we wanted to be more than jotas, mal-floras, or jotos y maricones. We left the local political scene, while the new vanguard llamada ESPERANZA was coming of age. We were educated, sophisticated and so out of place. We were QUEERS. We didn't fit within the white gay community because we were a different experience for them. We didn't want to be their mamacitas or papacitos, and we hated being patronized. We identified with the young drag queers down at Travis Park, the primo meat market of the late 70's-early 80's, or we identified with the "bull dyke", but we didn't want to be—we wanted more.

We didn't fit within the Barrios because we were the family shame that got thrown out into the street. Within the Chicano movement we were a difficult and complex question that needed to take a backseat to more urgent needs. And within the general population, we existed as a group outside the offers of quick sex as educated, creative, gay people loved by families who did not speak of our homosexuality. We felt unwanted, so we claimed ourselves away from here. Those were the times when we, the Chicano youth, claimed our political identity: we were tired and angry about being treated like foreigners in our own land. We did not have the means to help the communities from which we sprang. ESPERANZA would come in a little while, but we would be gone.

While I and my fellow artist friends sought to create our identities, as artists and as sexual beings, there came in 1987 kindred souls to form esperanza, The Esperanza Peace and Justice Center —an institute readily identifiable as a source of empowerment and development—as meaningful to San Antonio's comunidad Latina as any existing institution of long-standing in the Barrios, for it reflects the morality of our raza, our women, our mejicanitas. ESPERANZA stands on the very moral ground

... cont'd on pg 13

Editor's note: The May issue of La Voz brought 25 people together, (see names at left) to fold. Platicas crisscrossed the tables in Spanish, English and TexMex as we worked. Carmen Tafolla featured in the May Voz issue and her husband, Ernesto Bernal, were among the group. We discovered that some of us were San Antonianos that had traversed the U.S. returning to San Antonio. Others, like myself, moved to San Anto for the richness of its historic cultural and linguistic heritage. Still others had never left SA or had immigrated directly from Mexico. Several had lived in Boston for a time. Among the group was Elva Pérez Treviño who grew up as a young lesbiana in the Westside and had felt compelled to leave. She had recently returned to San Antonio. I shared with her the significance of the LGBTQ community in Esperanza's 25 year history but noted that we needed the stories of the Chicana/o queer community before Esperanza. She agreed to write a short piece for the May issue. In June, the Esperanza Center will pay tribute to the LGBTQ community of SA with a special art exhibit, ¡Queers, presente! 25 años~25 artists. In the meantime, read on...

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**VOZ VISION STATEMENT:** La Voz de Esperanza speaks for many individual, progressive voices who are gente-based, multi-visioned and milagro-bound. We are diverse survivors of materialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, classism, violence, earth-damage, speciesism and cultural and political oppression. We are recapturing the powers of alliance, activism and healthy conflict in order to achieve interdependent economic/spiritual healing and fuerza. La Voz is a resource for peace, justice, and human rights, providing a forum for criticism, information, education, humor and other creative works. La Voz provokes bold actions in response to local and global problems, with the knowledge that the many risks we take for the earth, our body, and the dignity of all people will result in profound change for the seven generations to come.

ship with IDRA, is combining Latina leadership development with education advocacy. Through this PTA, family leaders are examining data on student achievement, attrition rates, and college readiness and hosting community-based meetings with school leaders to look together at how their schools are doing, focus on a shared vision for all children's success, and work out roles each can play to bring this to fruition. In this way, the strategy both banks on decades of research linking family engagement with better student and school outcomes (Henderson, et al., 2004) and promotes partnerships that respect family contributions and leadership.

## Coalition Building

Traced to the French and Latin terms for “fellowship” and “the growing together of parts” (as in coalesce), coalition building describes the process of developing a partnership of organizations to advance a common purpose. Needed as they are, coalitions designed to improve education have not always lived up to their potential. Too often, they have failed to include grassroots organizations and parents of children in public schools (Mediratta, et al., 2009).

Against this backdrop, a case-study review of the development of the Educational Justice Collaborative provides important insights. The EJC is a coalition of more than two dozen organizations in California whose goal is to attain high quality education for all children. Formed around the class action suit, *Williams vs. State of California*, the EJC has brought together community organizers, educators, researchers, and policy and legal advocates to coordinate research and policy and build community capacity to promote systems change.

One of EJC's first actions, based on a review of statewide school outcome data, was to craft an Educational Bill of Rights. The bill highlights every student's right to an education under the California constitution and, within this framework, to high quality teachers, and to safe and supportive learning environments. Importantly, the bill also calls for reliable public information on school outcomes, and regular community forums with public officials, to build in accountability for resources and results. Since the Williams settlement, coalition members have turned their attention to realizing these rights through work on school funding equity, college readiness and the state's data system (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

## School Capacity Building

School capacity building, the most familiar of the three change strategies, involves the process of assuring that schools have the vision, leadership, faculty, curricula and resources to engage all students in learning. It begins with the recognition that substantial changes require interacting strategies, ensuring: that teachers are valued, prepared and well-equipped; that curriculum is rigorous, challenging and exciting; that students' strengths are recognized and can flourish; and that families and community members are engaged as partners (Robledo Montecel, 2005). Rather than working apart from or at odds with the first two strategies, school capacity building depends on each for continuous self-renewal (Villarreal, 2006).

This holistic approach can be seen in work underway at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD in South Texas. Unlike traditional dropout recovery strategies, PSJA's College, Career & Technology Academy, carried out in partnership with South Texas College, is re-engaging students who have dropped out of school in new learning opportunities and a curriculum that prepares them for college. The results include increased graduation and college readiness rates. Further, to strengthen mathematics and science teaching and learning, PSJA is partnering with IDRA on professional development and strategies to strengthen community-school-family partnership.

If public education is not just to survive but to be transformed and thrive, turbulent times must not have us retrench and revert to the failed logic of the past. We need a new logic, built on knowledge and experience, bold commitment and respect. ❖

*Bio: Laurie Posner is a senior education associate at the Intercultural Development Research Association, an independent, nonprofit organization in San Antonio, dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in public education for all children. This article first appeared in the IDRA Newsletter September, 2010. For full list of resources email la.voz@esperanzacenter.org.*

... *Elva's Story*, cont'd from pg 2



*At the Paseo por el Westside in May, Elva taught Ariana (left) and a friend to shoot marbles.*

that ESPERANZA is us, the community that stands behind the women who became inspired enough, had will enough to seek a manifestation of what is just—and desire, stronger still, to return a sense of orgullo to the Barrios of San Antonio. To claim the right as women to speak for other women, for our children, our youth, our brethren, to speak for our right to the streets, to return a means for our voices to be heard. To this I have returned, a San Antonio full of ESPERANZA.

When I first walked through ESPERANZA's front doors it was to attend a Noche Azul concert. The first person that greeted me seemed so familiar to me. Turns out, I did not know her from anywhere in particular, but the familiarity struck me so deep that later that night words poured out of me. I felt compelled to record the experience. Under all circumstances the words remain inadequate for they do not fully translate the experience that is ESPERANZA for they do not capture the sense of belonging. These words are an attempt to describe this ancient connect we all feel when we see something good, something noble. This is what I see in the women who are ESPERANZA. To them I say:

*I know you longer than I know your name  
I know you longer then this ancient game  
Called living*

*Among the Living  
I know you deeper then any dream  
you dream*

*I know you holier than any holy thing  
I know*

*I know*

*I know I know you deeper then anyone  
I claim.*

Gracias por darne tanta esperanza!

*Bio: Elva Pérez Treviño is an artist, writer, political activist and attorney born and raised in San Antonio's Westside.*