



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



A PUKAR researcher talks with a community member about children's health.

Innovation in India

UUSC fellowship funds community-driven water research

By Jessica L. Atcheson

UUSC launched the inaugural 2015 Human Rights Innovation Fellowship to support projects with the potential to effect systemic change that advances the human right to water. Chosen out of 43 applications, the winning proposal came from Partners for Urban Knowledge,

Action, and Research (PUKAR), based in Mumbai, India. With the \$25,000 fellowship award, PUKAR will conduct a rapid water survey in Mandala, a slum in Mumbai, and will provide residents with the necessary data to advocate for their human right to water.

Continued on page 2



The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee advances human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures and mobilizing to challenge oppressive policies.

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We Welcome Letters

Rights Now is grateful to readers for their interest and support. We invite you to share your questions and comments by submitting a letter to the editor:

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In this edition of

Rights Now

Cover

Innovation in India

UUSC fellowship funds community-driven water research

Page 5

In Their Own Words: Not Any Less Human

An interview with Emina Bužinkić

Page 9

Thirty-Year Champions for UUSC

Page 10

The Old Ship Legacy

Page 12

Planned Giving: For Everyone, Always

Page 14

Beyond Just Recovery in Haiti

Exploring how small farmers are cooling the planet

Page 16

Turning Learning into Action

New Food Justice Activist Network

Page 18

No Safe Haven Here

UUSC documents traumas of U.S. immigration detention



A message from UUSC's president

This will be the last time I write you in *Rights Now* because I will be retiring as UUSC president as of June 30, 2016. This winter the UUSC Board will name my successor. It's been an enormous privilege to serve this organization as CEO since 2010 (and for six years on its board before that). I'm proud of all we've accomplished together since 2010. Here are just a few highlights:

- Founding the UU College of Social Justice
- Making our building certified by the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) program at the platinum level, the highest possible
- Earning four stars (the most you can earn) from Charity Navigator for the past four years for transparency and efficient use of funds
- Expanding our capacity to do research, file litigation, mobilize online, and assess our impact
- Instituting the new Justice-Building Program to help our congregations be more effective agents of change
- Raising more than \$22 million in our UUSC Rising special gifts campaign



Most of all, I'm proud of how many people we've helped.

If one thing has characterized UUSC throughout these years, it has been our willingness to try new approaches to human rights change. This issue of *Rights Now* describes some of the most recent examples. It's not that we gratuitously abandon what's already working, but rather that we see ourselves as incubators of change who seed new projects. Then, if they are successful, we encourage others to support them. UUSC is not a large organization, but it is highly targeted in its strategies and highly effective in its outcomes.

I'm grateful to have been a part of this remarkable enterprise — and I hope you are too!

Bill Schulz

PUKAR and the right to research

PUKAR is, in its own words, “an independent research collective and an urban knowledge production center.” Founded in 2002 to encourage more inclusive conversations about urban issues, PUKAR works to make research accessible to all. Its aim: to expand access to the knowledge people need to make change and contribute to local, national, and global debates about the issues that affect their lives and futures.

Arjun Appadurai, founder of PUKAR and now president of its board of trustees, wrote “The Right to Research,” a 2006 article in the journal *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. Anita Patil-Deshmukh, executive director of PUKAR, explains: “In that essay, he claims that anyone can be a researcher. It doesn’t only have to be the MDs and the PhDs. . . . Common

people not only *can* do research — they *need* to do it.”

PUKAR’s focus on community-driven research as a tool for advocacy stood out to UUSC. Amber Moulton, UUSC’s own researcher, said, “We are thrilled to support PUKAR and its Rapid Water Survey project. PUKAR’s innovative community-based research model ensures that rights holders are not only at the table — they are the people who will be shaping water policy.”

In addition to innovative ideas, PUKAR also has a track record that bodes well for the success of the fellowship project. Its accomplishments are impressive:

- Trained 3,000 “barefoot researchers”
- Published two books
- Engaged with 300 communities
- Mapped more than 50 communities
- Reached out to 10,000 people



PUKAR community researchers distribute material to people living in slum communities.

- Conducted 300 research projects
- Supported creation of more than 100 pieces of audio-video content by barefoot researchers

What is a barefoot researcher?

PUKAR's youth fellowship program trains young people from low-resource neighborhoods to become barefoot researchers — residents who investigate topics rooted in their own lives and then use the resulting knowledge to effect change. "I believe this particular model of barefoot researchers as community-based youth action and research is a very good instrument to bring action to slum communities," says Patil-Deshmukh.

Once PUKAR identifies youth in a given community — through community focus group discussions and ensuing informal connections — fellows receive intensive training. PUKAR leads activity-based workshops in the fundamentals of research: ethics, interviews, methodology, mapping, photographing, and more. Participants are also trained on issues of gender, the environment, caste, class, and religion.

The barefoot researchers then dive into conducting research on a topic central to their lives in the slums. As part of data collection, the youth are engaging in "door-to-door education" and strengthening vital community connections. Plus, they are often more effective at gathering data because they're already trusted by their neighbors. Following data collection, the barefoot researchers act as organizers for action to address the needs that their data demonstrates.

Patil-Deshmukh highlights an added bonus of the youth fellowship program:

"Many of our youth had actually stopped going to school because they didn't have money to pay for the schooling. Once they become barefoot researchers and start working with us, we reimburse them for their work. They save the money, and many of them end up completing their schooling — and that is the best byproduct of our barefoot researchers program."

Water access in India

For the UUSC fellowship project, a group of PUKAR barefoot researchers will take on the issue of water access in a Mumbai slum — and for good reason. As Moulton articulates: "The survey will collect hard data on Mumbai residents' lack of access to water, one of the most critical, and often unmet, factors we need to realize the human rights to water and sanitation."

In India, 75% of the population does not have access to drinking water on premises. Approximately 609,000 children die in India annually because of diarrhea and pneumonia, conditions closely related to water and sanitation access. In Mumbai, 60% of people live in slums. In one slum, Kaula Bandar, PUKAR research found that only 0.1% of the residents have access to piped drinking water.

In Mumbai, the city controls water access in the slums, some of which are off official maps and therefore not properly accounted for in water plans. In Mandala, for example, half of the community is not on an official map and is thereby unaccounted for in city water distribution. As a result, people — often called the "water mafia" — exploit slum residents by selling them water at inflated and unaffordable

prices. And that's not the only problem: since the responsibility for gathering household water often falls to women and girls, the extra challenges of obtaining water keep them from attending school, building livelihoods, and more.

Rapid Water Survey

PUKAR's Rapid Water Survey will be conducted in the Mandala slum, which is home to more than 25,000 people.

The survey data collected and processed by barefoot researchers will cover the following:

- Location of contaminated taps
- Location of nonfunctioning taps
- Areas without any tap water access
- Household-to-tap ratios for each functioning tap
- Water reliability index mapping low pressure or highly interrupted flow
- Water quality and quantity
- Cost/affordability

As part of PUKAR's Healthy Cities, Wealthy Cities initiative, the Rapid Water Survey will provide residents with the tools and data to advocate for improvements in water service and hold the government accountable. PUKAR anticipates the project will affect 50,000 people over three years.

Ultimately, PUKAR aims to decouple home ownership from water service and ensure adequate water and sanitation for all people living in Mumbai's slums. Moulton says: "I am excited to see the project unfold over the coming year and hope we can help PUKAR share its model with other communities who need research to create change."

Jessica L. Atcheson is UUSC's writer and editor.



PUKAR community researchers interviewing members of a slum community.

In Their Own Words: Not Any Less Human

An interview with Emina Bužinkić

Conducted by Jessica L. Atcheson

In the following interview, Emina Bužinkić from the Center for Peace Studies, a UUSC partner in Croatia, speaks about the center's work aiding Middle Eastern refugees in transit and taking part in the Welcome Initiative. This interview, conducted via Skype in October, has been edited for length.

Can you tell me about the Welcome Initiative?

It's a platform of solidarity of residents and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] working in Croatia. These NGOs have been working in different fields, including sustainable development, education, human rights, peace building, and gender equality. Everyone has recognized the importance of supporting refugees during this crisis.

Our work has been coordinated every day in a fantastic way with open communication and coordination of our activities — on the borders and in the refugee camps, while talking to diplomatic staff, and communicating with the public through roundtables, seminars, webinars, and our public campaign. This initiative is giving us further energy and further motivation to respond to this crisis.

What has been your interaction with the refugees you're working with?

Many people who we meet with — hundreds and thousands of them — we are not able to talk to in depth. They

are in the camps, in transit through the territories and borders, and they are usually in very fast transit in our country, as it is in Serbia and Slovenia. But from the refugees we have talked to in the camps, we hear about why they are fleeing their countries. Most people are very, very tired and very thankful when they receive food and blankets. If they need a doctor, we take them to a facility where medical assistance is provided.

What are the biggest challenges in this work?

In talking about the refugee crisis, many people would say that the crisis is happening to us, because many people are coming to our territory. There are a lot of myths and prejudice against the refugees, and people are not well informed and well educated when it comes to this. So it's a huge challenge to change those attitudes.

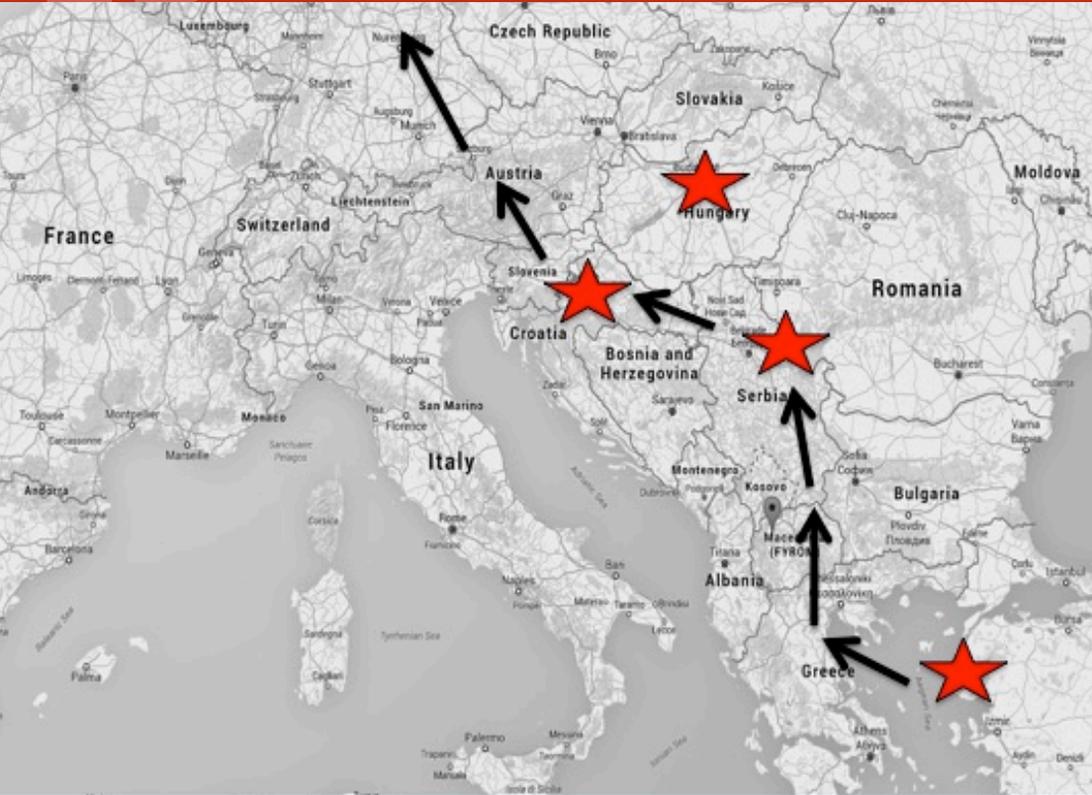
But the thing is that the crisis is not happening to us, it is happening in Syria, it is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan. The refugees are trying to escape from that crisis. Even if all the people who are in our country today stayed, it's not a crisis for Croatia. We can handle it.

Where do you find hope as you do this work?

We have been living in Croatian society for 25 years now [Croatia declared independence in June 1991], and we

Continued on page 8

UUSC Partner Work across the Migration Route



UUSC addresses human rights violations against refugees and asylum seekers that are fueled by border restrictions, shortsighted immigration controls, and other nationalistic policies. In all contexts, UUSC commits itself to these principles: migration is not a crime, and migrants are not criminals. People who travel across borders — whether by choice or by force — are not threats to the societies they enter; they are benefactors, who are offering to other countries the gifts of themselves as unique human beings possessed of worth and dignity. UUSC continues to affirm this truth as the only antidote to the fearmongering and scapegoating that threaten the rights of refugees worldwide.



Greece: Ensuring decent reception conditions

UUSC is partnering with **PRAKSIS**, a Greek nongovernmental organization, to provide immediate transportation assistance and winterization kits to newly arrived refugees and their children on the Greek island of Lesbos, the first point of entry to Europe for many refugees.



Serbia: Providing comprehensive mobile assistance along the transit route

The **Asylum Protection Center (APC)**, a UUSC partner, is mobilizing a team of aid workers who will travel along shifting migration routes and provide a comprehensive array of direct services to refugees, including legal support, humanitarian aid, psychosocial counseling, and language interpretation.



Croatia: Offering support for long-term resettlement

UUSC is partnering with the **Center for Peace Studies (CPS)**, a Zagreb-based organization that is spearheading the Welcome Initiative, a collaborative effort of 50 organizations to address refugee resettlement and to provide immediate humanitarian support for refugees.



Hungary: Facilitating family reunification

In partnership with UUSC, the **Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC)** is working with refugee families who have been torn apart by war and providing them with full financial and legal support to reunite safely in Europe.

Continued from page 5

have experienced war. We always say that we wouldn't want anyone else to experience what we have experienced here. So always, during the last 20 years or so, civil actions have been run under the slogan: "Enough of wars; give us peace." Many of us were refugees. We know what it is to live in a foreign society and to not be accepted, to be labeled — that's a common experience of many activists here. So, we act from experiences.

I think our hope is that we would like to see peace building as an act of protest. There are refugees living in Croatia who we have been working with for many years now through different kinds of projects, such as the football club that we have established together with refugees or the Taste of Home culinary collective we have. This kind of intercultural connection is very important.

What do you most want people to know about the work that the Center for Peace Studies is doing?

We would like people to know that, first of all, we are an organization of human

beings, who decided to be activists because of injustice in this world. I don't say citizens — not because I don't think we have civic responsibilities, but because the concept of nation states and post-colonialism tells us that citizens are only those who have papers. There are many people in this world who do not have documents confirming their identity, but that doesn't mean they are any less human, even though some people treat them that way. So we are an organization of human beings who are willing to support other human beings in their fight for equality.

Learn more about UUSC's work advancing justice for refugees in Europe at uusc.org/location/syria. Read a longer version of this interview at uusc.org/emina.

Jessica L. Atcheson is UUSC's writer and editor.

Where Will We Be in 2040?

On January 25, UUSC created a time capsule in honor of its 75th anniversary. This snapshot of our work in 2015 was concealed in the lobby of UUSC's building with a small ceremony. The capsule will be reopened after 25 years in 2040, as a part of UUSC's 100th anniversary celebration. Find out more at uusc.org/timecapsule.

Thirty-Year Champions for UUSC

By Maxine Neil

Richard and Judith Ottman, members of White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church in Minnesota who go by Dick and Judy, have been Unitarian Universalists for over 40 years. And for more than 30 of those years, they have been steadfast UUSC supporters and volunteers.

Judy was first introduced to UUSC's work when Dick Scobie, then president and CEO of UUSC, established social justice units in the region made up of individuals from nearby congregations. At that time, White Bear UU Church had a membership of only 30 people — today, there are more than 600 members. Judy and Dick are strong champions for UUSC in their congregation. The highlight of their dedication each year is Judy's work in managing the Guest at Your Table program.

When asked what motivates their strong decades-long support of UUSC, the Ottmans' reply is extensive: First, only UUSC bears the UU name. Second, UUSC's work correlates with their personal human rights values. And further, UUSC is a good steward of their financial support, is independent of government influence, provides them an opportunity to leverage their contribution through the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock match, and consistently receives Charity Navigator's highest rating.



The Ottmans with statues of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt

Not only does Judy like UUSC's focus on issues affecting women, but she also knows her support is being used wisely. Contributing \$5,000 or more annually, the Ottmans are members of the Stewardship Circle, a core of committed supporters who share their insights and ideas to provide for UUSC.

Would you like to join the Ottmans in becoming UUSC champions? Contact Cassandra Ryan, vice president and chief development officer, at [617-301-4340](tel:617-301-4340) or cryan@uusc.org to learn more.

Maxine Neil is the former vice president and chief development officer of UUSC.

The Old Ship Legacy

By Maxine Neil

Hundreds of congregations generously support UUSC each year through Guest at Your Table, Justice Sunday, advocacy actions, and more. Among them, First Parish in Hingham (Mass.) — known as Old Ship Church — stands out.

The oldest U.S. wooden church building in continuous use, Old Ship is a beauty outside and in. And while its physical structure is impressive, the dedication of Rev. Kenneth Read-Brown and more than 200 members to UUSC's work really makes Old Ship special.

Old Ship has been an annual supporter of UUSC's work as far back as we have records. "It is wonderful to be a part of the hope that UUSC creates throughout the world," Read-Brown says.

When asked why he believes his congregation members have been such loyal supporters, Read-Brown responds that it's spiritual fulfillment — we all have an innate desire to be

a part of the global world and to help our fellow humans. He explains that, though you can't always respond to every disaster or human rights challenge, it is a moral imperative to yield to the yearning of your heart to reach out to others and put your values to work. And UUSC is a conduit to global community.

Davalene Cooper, the congregational liaison between Old Ship and UUSC, has been instrumental in keeping her congregation updated on UUSC's work. First Parish Hingham also hosts coffeehouse folk music concerts, with net proceeds benefitting UUSC. The coffeehouse events provide additional opportunities for people in the community to learn about UUSC's work.

Maxine Neil is the former vice president and chief development officer of UUSC.



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Planned Giving: For Everyone, Always

An interview with Marie Williams

Conducted by Jessica L. Atcheson

In this edited interview, Marie Williams, UUSC's planned giving and major gifts officer, shares thoughts about planned giving after more than a decade in the field.

What are the benefits of planned giving?

There are so many: flexibility, tax breaks. It can enable people who can't otherwise give a large donation in their lifetime to create a gift in the future. I recently received a distribution from a trust that amounted to more than three times the amount this donor gave during his lifetime. He was a steady, dedicated donor for 33 years. He let us know about his plans, but not the details. To our delight, the gift was close to \$100,000.

Tell us about some of the most popular giving options.

This is on the nerdy side of planned giving, but someone can set up a gift annuity. They part with a modest sum of money, but they get a huge charitable tax deduction up front and income for the rest of their life. It's a way to really make an impact while making it work for your lifestyle. Naming UUSC as a beneficiary in your will is by far the most common option, and along the same lines, beneficiary designations in IRAs or retirement plans.

When should people start thinking about planned giving?

Always! But particularly when there are huge life events: getting married,



having children. Planned giving can be spread across all ages, and it's often a bigger priority for people 65 and older. Everyone thinks that planned giving is not for them right now, but I think it applies to everyone always.

What do you wish more people knew about planned giving?

It's not scary! I'm a planner, so I like the idea of knowing how things are going to happen in the future. Even if you aren't a planner, there are so many vehicles that can fit your lifestyle — with a gift in your will,

you can designate it and forget it. And it's a great way to leave a legacy for things that you care about. If you are passionate about social justice and defending people's rights, then you can make a significant financial impact through a planned gift. And it isn't as hard as you might think — it doesn't have to be a long drawn-out process.

Want to learn more about your planned giving options? Contact Marie Williams at 617-301-4329 or mwilliams@uusc.org.

Jessica L. Atcheson is UUSC's writer and editor.

Service Learning in Nicaragua: Fair Trade and Environmental Justice May 21 –29, 2016

Take part in the UU College of Social Justice's newest program, in partnership with Equal Exchange! Find out why not all fair trade is equally "fair" and why UUSC works with Equal Exchange to source coffee and other goods in a way that truly benefits small farmers. Visit coffee co-ops, women's rights groups, and an inspiring community defending their land against mining. Join us!

Learn more and register: uucs.org/nicaragua.



Beyond Just Recovery in Haiti

Exploring how small farmers are cooling the planet

By Hannah Hafter

The 2010 Haiti earthquake left up to 300,000 people dead and 1.6 million homeless. Since its founding in 2012, the Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice (UUCSJ) has brought 24 groups of volunteers to Haiti to assist with the recovery. Five years after the earthquake, UUCSJ is working with the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP) to bring new energy and focus to UUCSJ service-learning journeys to Haiti, unveiling the new Beyond Just Recovery program.

The new program builds on the strong foundation of its predecessor. The Just Recovery program engaged people in learning about effective and justice-oriented recovery models, understanding the failures of the international aid response, and supporting projects initiated by local communities. With MPP and other partners, volunteers helped

construct six eco-villages and a school — a community where families who survived the earthquake have rebuilt their lives after relocating from the camps of Port-au-Prince.

With the eco-village construction complete, UUCSJ and MPP have created the Beyond Just Recovery program to explore food sovereignty and climate justice — critical issues at the core of MPP's work. Participants will learn firsthand about the effects of climate change on the Global South, the environmental damage caused by decades of colonial exploitation, and the leadership of rural peasant movements in advancing climate justice and global sustainability.

In the United States, people most often hear about Haiti in the context of poverty, political turmoil, and foreign aid. UUCSJ's journeys challenge these limited views as



Recycled container gardens at an eco-village in Haiti's Central Plateau.

participants hear from community leaders and witness the joy, pride, and creativity that the Haitian grassroots brings to facing the country's complex challenges. Participants also work side by side with eco-village residents on agricultural projects for self-sufficiency and income generation. Daily work includes building raised recycled container gardens, planting seedlings, making natural insecticides, and constructing goat pens.

Beyond Just Recovery delves into themes of food sovereignty for the Global South and in participants' own communities. "Food sovereignty" refers to a more democratic way of organizing the food system, centered in the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and consumed locally. In this model, food is a right rather than a market-driven commodity.

Historically, the Haitian people grew most of their own food. Up until the 1980s, Haitian farmers produced enough rice to feed the country and still have enough left over to export. Now, due to U.S. neoliberal

trade policies, this situation has been entirely reversed: 83% of the rice Haitians now consume comes from abroad, and Haiti's own small-scale producers have been rendered destitute. The food sovereignty movement aims to change that.

Food sovereignty and the return to local food are also strategies for dealing with climate change. Industrial agriculture contributes 22% of greenhouse gas emissions globally, and another 13% is attributed to long-distance transportation of agricultural goods. Beyond Just Recovery explores how agroecology is part of a global strategy to cool the planet.

To learn more and register for Beyond Justice Recovery in Haiti, visit uucsj.org/haiti.

Hannah Hafter is UUCSJ's senior associate for service-learning programs.



Residents of an eco-village in Haiti's Central Plateau.

Turning Learning into Action

New Food Justice Activist Network

By Jessica L. Atcheson

The food chain in the United States — which employs more than 20 million workers — is riddled with injustice. Making change throughout the food industry will take commitment, coordination, and collective action. UUSC’s Justice-Building Program has launched the UUSC Food Justice Activist Network to provide people with the resources and support to embark on effective organizing campaigns designed to transform the food industry.

Why the food chain?

Farmworkers, poultry processors, restaurant servers, and others in the food industry face a host of challenges every day as they try to make a living and support their families. Just a taste of what they are up against:

- Low pay with few or no benefits
- Wage theft
- Discrimination
- Harassment
- Hazardous working conditions

Pamela Sparr, who heads UUSC’s Justice-Building Program and created the Food Justice Activist Network, explains, “Ensuring access to safe, healthy, affordable food and safe, fairly paid jobs throughout the chain of food production connects with multiple movements: racial justice, immigrant

justice, economic, and environmental justice, just to name a few. Food justice is a natural and important focus for the first of UUSC’s new activist networks.”

About the activist network

The initial members of the Food Justice Activist Network were participants in a recent training — Justice in the Food Chain — that was collaboratively produced by the UU College of Social Justice and the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA) in Chicago. The training brought together food chain workers with activist allies who care about sourcing food in a way that is both environmentally conscious and fair to workers. Now the UUSC Food Justice Activist Network will support the congregation-based participants in leveraging their learning into action.

The hallmarks of the network:

- Welcomes people of all faith traditions as well as those who feel called from a place of spirituality or conscience without a particular religious identity
- Offers problem solving, coaching, supportive listening, and strategizing
- Provides valuable tools and resources

Supporting the Good Food Purchasing Policy

The first organizing effort that network activists are tackling is promoting the Good Food Purchasing Policy (GFPP), which deals with public food procurement in various cities. With support from UUSC and the Food Chain Workers Alliance (FCWA), network members will rally community energy for implementing the GFPP in their own areas.

According to FCWA, GFPP provides a metric-based policy that enables institutions to “work with food service providers, distributors, processors and growers to create a transparent ‘farm-to-fork’ food supply.” The policy standards are based on five factors:

- Local economies
- Environmental sustainability
- Fair labor
- Animal welfare
- Nutrition

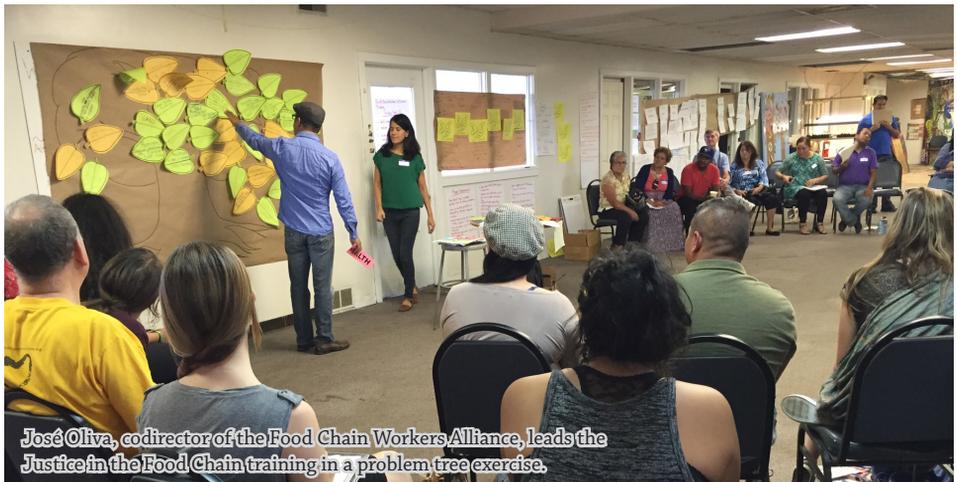
First developed by the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, the GFPP governs an estimated 750,000 meals a day in

Los Angeles via the city and school district. The Food Justice Activist Network aims to expand the program to other cities and states. UUSC and the FCWA recently called on Food Justice Activist Network members and other supporters to urge the Darden corporation — which has more than 1,500 restaurants with 150,000 employees and serves 320 million meals a year — to abide by GFPP principles. More than 3,600 people had signed the online petition as of November 2015.

This work will have additional support, too: “I am very pleased to announce that the board of UU Food Justice Ministries (formerly the UUA President’s Advisory Committee on Ethical Eating) is enthusiastically partnering with us on this campaign,” says Sparr.

For more information on opportunities with UUSC’s Justice-Building Program, visit uusc.org/justicebuilding.

Jessica L. Atcheson is UUSC’s writer and editor.



José Oliva, codirector of the Food Chain Workers Alliance, leads the Justice in the Food Chain training in a problem tree exercise.

No Safe Haven Here

UUSC documents traumas of U.S. immigration detention

By Amber Moulton

In the summer of 2014, the Obama administration reintroduced the retrograde practice of detaining asylum-seeking mothers and children in “family detention” facilities. In 2015, the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), a UUSC partner, identified a need for research on the mental health of families at two of these facilities, in Karnes City and Dilley, Texas. UUSC identified mental and behavioral health experts with extensive experience working with Central American refugees to investigate — and the research team uncovered disturbing findings.

Over half of the participants in the study exhibited high levels of anxiety and depression symptoms and nearly half appeared to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD). In addition, the research team identified symptoms of complex trauma disorder, often the result of repeated traumas.

These families are survivors of trauma who have come to the United States seeking refuge. Yet, they remain in a state of flux, or worse, face additional traumas in the U.S. immigration process. One mother who had fled Honduras with her children told the research team, “I feel it is harder as a mother. I feel bad because I brought my kids here so [gang members] wouldn’t torture them and in some way I have been torturing them all the way. We have suffered a lot, a lot, in Mexico, in the prison we ended going to. . . . I feel I am running away from torture and I am torturing them myself.”



The detention center in Karnes City, Texas, where families seeking asylum are being held in jail-like conditions.

Detention can cause added trauma

Every participant in this study identified traumatic events as the reason they fled Central America. They commonly had seen family members killed, often by members of international gangs. In many cases, the gangs had extorted the families and threatened to kidnap their children. The mothers expressed a sense that their children's very lives depended on making the treacherous journey to seek asylum in the United States.

In some cases, the participants' experiences with U.S. Border Patrol and in detention may have actually made their negative mental health outcomes worse. For instance, the families reported being separated by U.S. Border Patrol. A Honduran mother reported that her teenaged children and husband were all housed in different rooms at the "hieleras" ("ice boxes") used by the U.S. Border Patrol. She said, "I wouldn't sleep because I was always keeping an eye on them. . . . I got really scared that they would take them away from me."

Some mothers also reported that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials threatened that Child Protective Services would take their children if they complained about their treatment. Separation of parents from children is traumatic in any instance, but for families who have experienced the very real threat of children being kidnapped or killed, these practices can cause survivors to reexperience or revisit past traumas.

Recommendations

UUSC recommends three overarching changes based on this study:

- Cease family detention.
- Decriminalize the asylum process. Treating asylum seekers as criminals and placing them in jails represents a stark violation of their most basic human rights.
- Change Department of Homeland Security policies to require that all officials interacting with trauma survivors in the immigration process receive trauma training.



At the very least, U.S. immigration officials should not make survivors' situations worse. But truly honoring asylum seekers' human rights means they should be provided with the trauma-informed care they need.

Advocacy

In October, UUSC issued *No Safe Haven Here: Mental Health Assessment of Women and Children Held in U.S. Immigration Detention*, a report detailing these findings. (Read the report at uusc.org/nosafehavenreport [PDF] or on Medium at medium.com/no-safe-haven-here.) UUSC staff shared it with members of Congress and the Obama administration.

The report's release coincided with news that Texas might loosen its restrictions to allow Karnes and Dilley to be certified as child-care centers, in an attempt to justify the continued detention of children. UUSC mobilized to deliver a letter — signed by 30 mental health professionals from across the nation — to Texas Governor Greg Abbott detailing the troubling findings of this study.

UUSC will continue to pursue policy change by publicizing and sharing the findings of the report. Refugee families deserve safety and support — not imprisonment and trauma.

Amber Moulton is UUSC's researcher. For more information about the study, contact her at amoulton@uusc.org.



A child waits in a bus station with her family after they were released from detention in Texas.

Justice Sunday: Economic Justice

For many people in the Global North, economic justice is a phrase without any personal connection. But for millions of people around the world, it is the difference between living and dying.



This Justice Sunday — kicking off April 3 — explore economic justice and be a part of the movement to help people all around the world realize their rights. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”

Visit [usc.org/justicesunday](https://www.usc.org/justicesunday) to learn how you, your congregation, or your community group can participate.

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