



PHOTOS BY DAVID BACON

THE INDIGENOUS PROGRAM

CRLA'S INDIGENOUS PROGRAM EMPOWERS THE MOST VULNERABLE

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) launched the Indigenous Farmworker Program in 1993 to address the needs of California's growing indigenous Mexican farmworker communities. Today, approximately one in four farmworkers

in California is of indigenous Mexican origin. CRLA's Indigenous Program (IP), provides legal advocacy, educational outreach, and supports leadership development in California's rural indigenous communities.

WHO ARE THE INDIGENOUS?

The term "indigenous" refers to communities descended from the original occupants of the Americas who have maintained distinct cultural identities since prior to European colonization. Most of California's rural indigenous populations are from the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán, and Puebla – with growing numbers from Central America – and their population has drastically increased over the past three decades. Mexico is one of the top ten most linguistically diverse countries in the world, and indigenous community members in California speak over twenty distinct languages. The most common indigenous

languages among California farmworkers are Mixteco, Triqui, Zapoteco and Purepecha.

CRLA published a groundbreaking study documenting the needs of these hard-to-serve communities. Working with acclaimed researcher Rick Mines, the study showed that most governmental agencies and service providers fail to meet the language and cultural needs of indigenous farmworkers and their families. Rural indigenous farmworkers remain one of California's most isolated, underserved, underpaid, and exploited groups.

HOW DOES THE INDIGENOUS PROGRAM MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Led by Directing Attorney Maureen Keffer and staffed by four indigenous Community Workers, the IP serves rural indigenous communities around the state. In alignment with CRLA's mission to fight for justice alongside the most exploited communities of our society, the IP supports the development of active and engaged indigenous leaders with the skills to advocate for themselves and their communities.

IP staff adapted a CRLA-designed leadership and civic participation curriculum, "Tiene Algo Que Decir / Do You Have Something to Say?" to address the needs of indigenous community members, and dozens of individuals have received

the training in Spanish, Triqui, and Mixteco. Participants develop knowledge and practical skills needed to effectively participate in local decision making spaces and address their communities' often overlooked problems and needs.

In addition to our leadership development work, the IP team advocates for the provision of interpreters for indigenous language speakers in hospitals, the courts, and government agencies; for the basic rights of indigenous farmworkers to safe and healthy working conditions, fair wages, and workplaces free from discrimination; and for indigenous students' equal access to safe and supportive learning environments.



MAJOR INDIGENOUS PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Trained members of the CRLA Salinas Indigenous Community Comité in the CRLA-designed civic participation curriculum “Tiene Algo Que Decir / Do You Have Something to Say?” Graduates of the program testified in Triqui and Spanish before lawmakers in Sacramento in support of bills to increase the minimum wage and prohibit employers from reporting or threatening to report workers’ immigration status to authorities in retaliation for exercising their rights. Both bills passed and were signed into law. According to Senate staffers, the indigenous workers’ statements proved instrumental in the bills’ success.
- Secured safe and healthy housing for more than 250 primarily indigenous Oaxacan residents in Fresno County who lived next to and on top of a toxic waste dump. Led a coalition of federal, state, and local government and private partners that provided cash pay-outs to the families and constructed a 32-home housing development, establishing the largest indigenous Oaxacan home owner community outside of Mexico.
- Participated in the 2000 & 2010 US Census Complete Count Committees to ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach and remedy the undercount of indigenous farmworkers.
- Represented over 80 Kern County residents in one of the largest civil pesticide drift settlements for farmworkers in California history (\$3.4 million). Helped establish improved emergency response protocol utilizing greater inter-agency communication for pesticide incidents and requiring bilingual personnel.
- Represented indigenous clients in a civil rights complaint against a Monterey County hospital that failed to provide interpreters to indigenous language speakers. IP advocacy resulted in an agreement obligating the hospital to ensure that all limited English proficient patients receive the language assistance they need in a timely manner, and creating a Community Advisory Board to provide advice and input on the hospital’s language policies and procedures.

ABOUT CRLA

Founded in 1966, CRLA’s mission is to fight for justice and individual rights alongside the most exploited communities of our society. Through a network of regional offices and cross-cutting programs, CRLA provides legal services to over 32,000

low-income people annually. Our work impacts farmworkers, individuals with disabilities, immigrant populations, LGBT communities, women, children and families in rural areas.

For more information on CRLA, please visit: www.crla.org.

SUPPORT CRLA

Join us in the fight for justice

- **Tell** your friends and family about CRLA
- **Sign-up** for our Rural Justice Updates
- **Donate** online at www.crla.org

501 C(3) STATEMENT

Your contributions help CRLA provide outreach, community education and no-cost legal services to poor Californians and their families. CRLA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. Please consult your tax preparer for details. CRLA’s tax identification number is: 95-2428657.

Get involved

- **Host** a CRLA house party or office luncheon
- **Sponsor** a local CRLA fundraising event
- **Volunteer** at one of our local offices
- **Provide** pro bono counsel
- **Underwrite** a CRLA fellowship
- **Contact** our Development Department to learn more: development@crla.org